

## **Veterans Park, a place to enjoy nature, at least for now**

A fourth-grader recently said that he likes to play inside because that's where all the electrical outlets are! Today, children are missing out on the intimate relationship with Nature that we were able to experience. Present day kids can tell about threats to manatees, orangutangs and black-footed ferrets but have become increasingly separated from hands-on activities that ensure normal healthy development.

An age-appropriate knowledge of Natural History carries over into other sciences, and as we know scientists are in short supply. A childhood of climbing trees, damming creeks, fishing for tadpoles and minnows, building all types of shelters in the woods teach children basic engineering, physics and botany. Just lying in the long grass watching rabbits, birds and beetles encourages a curiosity and background knowledge that has stood us all in good stead at many times in our lives. For many years, the Montessori and Waldorf Schools have advocated experiential learning and 'Fox fire' has more recently successfully focused on nature.

Richard Louv has written a book titled, 'Last Child in the Woods,' Saving our children from Nature-deficit Disorder. He suggests that we need to improve the quality of the lives of future generations by enlarging our vision to include a closer walk in Nature.

Veterans Park is a microcosm of what was once common habitat along our coastline. Now it remains an essential island within a barrier island for migrating and permanent wildlife. If this park cherished and buffered from surrounding development, people will visit with their children and return to our area with binoculars and cameras instead of litter and graffiti. Even more snowbirds will visit, spend their money on lodging, restaurants and boost the cultural life with their appreciation. Other destinations have seen the benefits of eco-tourism, Okaloosa County can have that vision, too.

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