

## **Reconnecting with Nature, Jeff Williamson, President, Arizona Zoological Society**

We live in a region affected by climate change. We are hotter and drier. We are rapidly urbanizing; and in particular, many of our children only know the urban experience. With urbanization and travel there is a rapid increase in invasive species, along with development and drought; whole ecologies are being transformed fast.

Many of us believe we need to pursue lifestyles that are more sustainable, while reducing pressures on our environmental systems. Questions are being asked about how to re-engage in service to community those people who are consumed by virtual experiences at work, school and play. These questions are particularly relevant to children. So many young people today are growing up with technologies being an intimate part of their lifestyle. Empirical evaluations indicate technologies are influencing how we read, write, learn and form relationships. It is affecting the definition of engagement, exploration, entertainment and interactivity. There is growing information that indicates technologies are influencing more sedentary lifestyles and are contributing to health-related issues in children.

Within this context, and encouraged by Richard Louv's book "Last Child In The Woods," both national and local movements are springing up in an effort to encourage children to be outdoors, to discover their relationship with the rest of life, and to develop the skills to steward the quality of life throughout our communities.

This fall over 40 organizations will come together to enable and promote Be Outdoors Arizona. A wide variety of programs and activities are planned that encourage exploration, discovery, learning and stewardship and will connect people to the natural world in ways that enhance the quality of life. The State Parks and Recreation Association and many of its members, municipalities, State Parks Department, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Forest Service, and Arizona Game and Fish Department are all participating. Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, gardens and arboretums and zoos are participating. Environmental educators, science teachers and the professors concerned with physical health are contributors.

Be Outdoors Arizona will collaborate sharing audience, best practices and intellectual property in ways that produce a new definition of true community engagement.

Please join us in motivating people to reconnect to community, add value and contribute to healthy and vital lives. The Citizen Stewardship Program, which has been sponsored by the Arizona Community Foundation, and its members the Arizona Animal Welfare League and SPCA, Audubon Arizona, The Grand Canyon Trust, Liberty Wildlife, the Phoenix Zoo, Second Chance Center for Animals, and Tucson Audubon Society look forward to contributing to this exciting initiative.