How many times have we, who are in the nature and living history fields, experienced children that were fearful because they were exposed to surroundings that were out of the ordinary to them? Do you think this lack of interaction with nature is part of a trend for today’s youth? Richard Louv, an author and journalist from San Diego, tackles this alarming issue in his book *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder*. Louv’s book has had a powerful effect in the nature and outdoor education fields, specifically in terms of what we are teaching children and how we connect to those who have what Louv calls Nature-Deficit Disorder. As the book gains popularity, we can ask ourselves, “How do we fit in?” Louv provides plenty of answers to this question.

The hypothesis of *Last Child in the Woods* is that today’s generation has grown up alienated from nature. This alienation has caused harm to these recent generations in the form of Nature-Deficit Disorder. This book is not just a soothsayer of doom and gloom; it provides a cure for NDD. According to Louv:

> Nature-deficit disorder describes the human costs of alienation from nature, among them: diminished use of the senses, attention difficulties, and higher rates of physical and emotional stresses, etc. The disorder can be detected in individuals, families and communities. Nature deficit can even change human behavior in cities, which could ultimately affect their design, since long standing studies show a relationship between the absence, or inaccessibility, of parks and open space with high crime rates, depression, and other urban maladies.

Louv introduces the reader to a variety of people from different generations and backgrounds to illustrate how children of the most recent generation interact with nature in comparison to children growing up for the majority of the twentieth century. In the last fifteen years or so parents have become reluctant to let their children play in nature for fear of “stranger danger,” and the over-scheduling of extracurricular activities for children has made it difficult for them to use their imaginations and play by themselves. Louv states that nature deficit can be recognized and reversed, both individually and culturally. Whereas the bulk of the reviews of *Last Child in the Woods* have focused on Louv’s discussion of the creation of NDD, few respond to the second half of his book, where he presents theories about how our society can reverse this trend and bring nature back into our neighborhoods, communities and metropolitan areas.
According to Louv, today’s children are growing up in what is known as the third frontier, which is characterized by at least five trends: a severance of the public and private mind from our food’s origins, a disappearing line between machines, humans, and other animals, an increased intellectual understanding of our relationship with animals, the invasion of our cities by wild animals, and the rise of a new kind of suburban form. While this frontier is still being formed, there are many ways that outdoor museums can help to connect the generation of this third frontier to nature. The recent film Barnyard showed all cattle (both male and female) with udders! If this is how children are learning about nature, we have a big job to do. Living history farms can expose both children and their parents to nature in a realistic and tangible way. Today’s children are learning more about worldwide ecosystems, which is not a bad thing, but they are not learning about the nature that surrounds them.

Richard Louv’s book, Last Child in the Woods, is an important read for everyone who works in an open-air museum or nature center. Many who read this will nod their head in agreement to the stories that he shares with readers. It may also make you rethink some of the ways you share your site with your visitors. One of the most quoted lines in the book is of a fourth-grader, Paul, from San Diego who said, “I like to play indoors because that’s where all the outlets are.” It is our duty to show Paul and others like him that you can have fun outside.