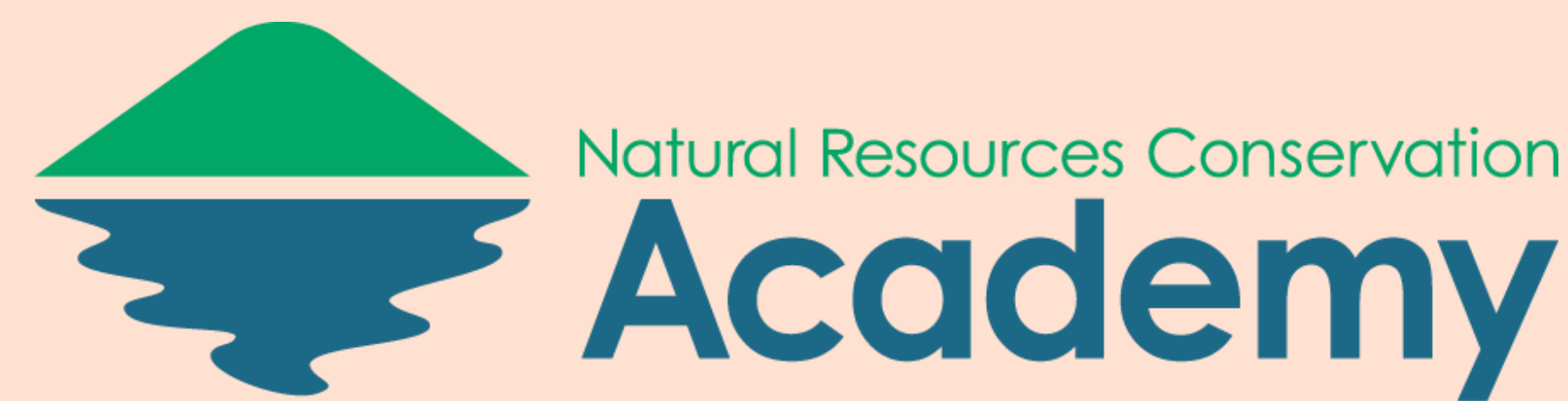


Nurturing in Nature: Encouraging Kids to Explore Outdoors



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Introduction

The average American child spends **4 to 7 minutes a day** in unstructured play outdoors, but **over 7 hours a day** in front of a screen (Louv 2010)

Spending time exploring in nature is a rite of childhood, and is critical in helping children develop analytical and sensory skills. Yet, the adventurous spirit of children is increasingly threatened as new mindsets and technologies take over the lives of today's kids.

Place-based nature education resources for youth are often nonexistent or inaccessible in many communities. Without connecting to nature, children lose an essential aspect of their development into lively individuals. Creating more accessible and engaging nature education resources may encourage kids to explore the outdoors again.

Project Goals

- 1) Provide families in Northeastern Connecticut with a place-based nature education resource for children.
- 2) Encourage use of Joshua's Trust (JT) properties for children and families to connect with nature.
- 3) Help children generate a better awareness of the environment that surrounds them with activities built to strengthen observational skills.



Figure 1: A scene from Phase 3, booklet pilot. A girl tests out activities from the packet in her backyard.

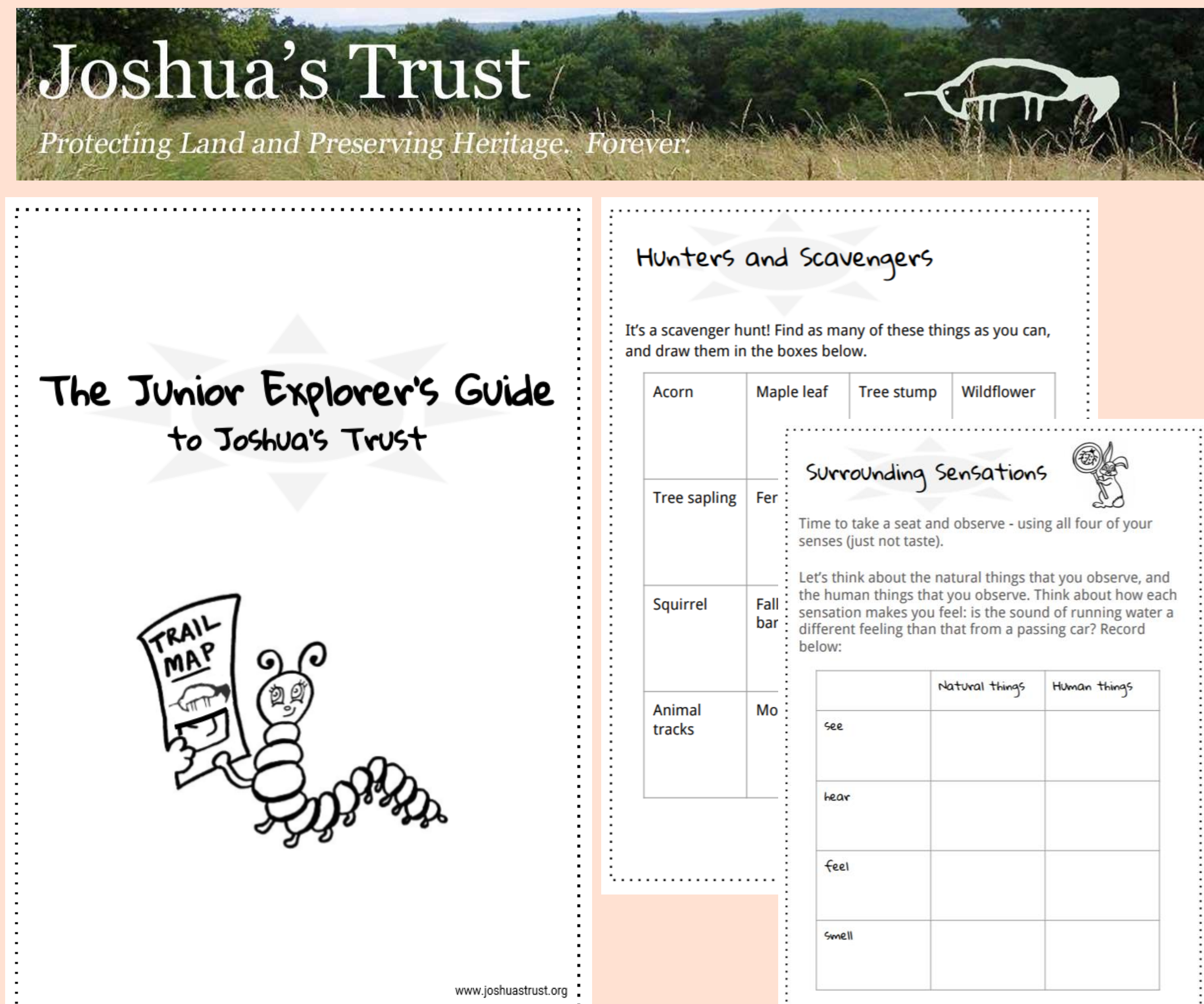


Figure 2: The title and example pages from "The Junior Explorer's Guide to Joshua's Trust."

Method and Procedures

Phase 1: Survey

- A paper survey was developed to identify how local families interact with nature on a daily basis.
- The survey was distributed at Celebrate Mansfield to 65 community members (parents/guardians of children).

Phase 2: Booklet development

- Using the survey data, booklet activities were developed.
- Booklet activities and original illustrations were designed to engage critical thinking and sensory development in participating children.

Phase 3: Booklet pilot

- The activity booklet, officially named "The Junior Explorer's Guide to Joshua's Trust", was piloted and critiqued by three different families and 10 children (Fig. 2).

Phase 4: Booklet distribution

- The booklet was printed and distributed to the local library, schools, and community center, and uploaded in PDF format to the JT website and promoted at JT events.

Results

Phase 1: Survey

- Findings demonstrated a need:
 - 76.4% of participants "mostly" agreed that they wanted to get their children more involved in outdoor activities," (Fig. 3a)
 - 72% of the participants agreed that they were in some way interested in using a nature activity book for their kids (Fig. 3b).

Phase 2 & 3: Booklet Pilot

- "Hands-on" activities were favored by the 10 children observed:
 - 50% claimed the scavenger hunt as their favorite activity
 - 100% agreed that the directions in the packet were clear, and that they would tell one of their friends that the activities were fun

Phase 4: Booklet Distribution

- After its release, the booklet proved to be very popular among community members: one response on JT's Facebook said, "Wonderful! I will print this out for my grandkids."

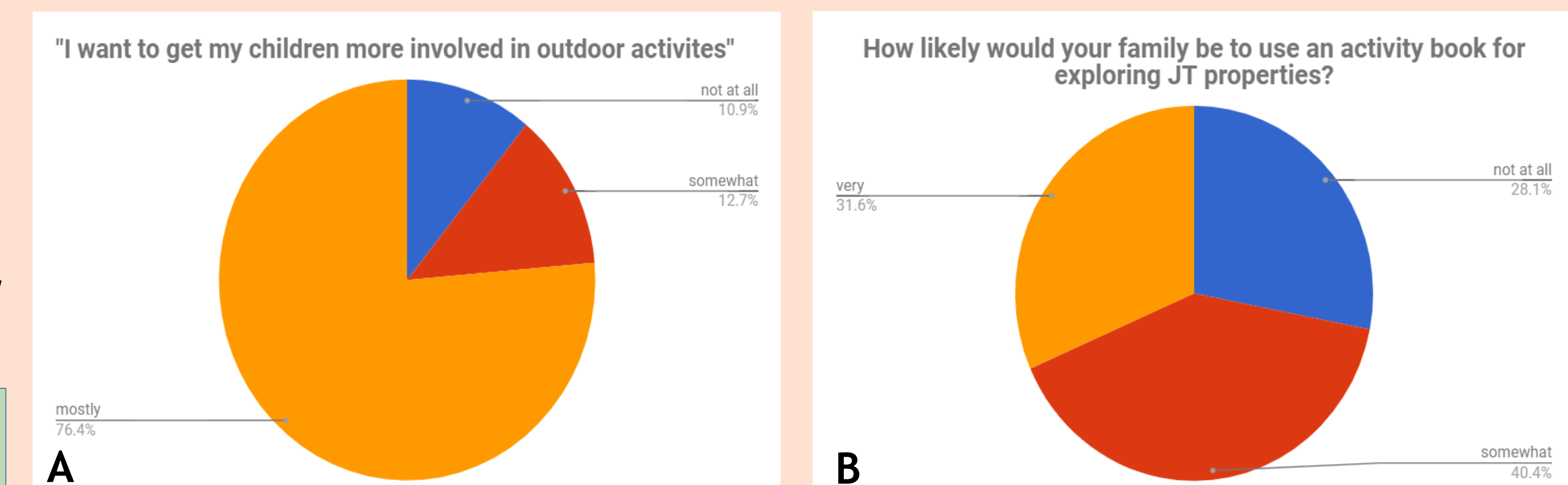


Figure 3a & b : Results from the survey of Phase 1. Participants ranked their level of agreement with various statements.

Conclusion

- "The Junior Explorer's Guide to Joshua's Trust" was as an accessible resource that encouraged children to explore outside and understand their natural surroundings.
- Activities like scavenger hunts, creative prompts, and scientific observation helped children both develop critical analytical skills and have fun outdoors.
- The community response (parents, educators, JT, and children) was overwhelmingly positive.

References

Louv, Richard. 2010. *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder*. Atlantic, 2010.

Acknowledgements

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Download your own copy of the booklet

<http://joshuatrust.org/student-project-helps-families-with-children-engage-with-nature-and-the-trust>