

The Nature Journal

Hon. J. Michael Miltenberger

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Statement to the Legislative Assembly

Mr. Speaker, the Government of the Northwest Territories recognizes the importance of educating our youth about the natural environment so they may manage the land for future generations with knowledge and respect. As part of Managing this Land Strategic Initiative, the department acknowledged the importance of educating our youth to understand and embrace sound stewardship values, to ensure the continued health and wealth of our land and Territory into the future.

At the appropriate time today, Mr. Speaker, I will be tabling a copy of The Nature Journal, a learning aid and resource tool for students to learn about the land and environment. The Nature Journal was developed for NWT youth by the forest management division of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources. The Nature Journal will give our youth a way to connect with their environments. It will allow them to reflect on and value nature and encourage them learn about their land and environment.

The Nature Journal provides ideas and activities for exploration and is organized around seasonal themes. One of the activities is to pick a tree to observe over the course of a year. It is hope youth will draw, write and make wishes for their tree and carry out explorations about some of the animals and birds that inhabit the woodlands near their homes.

Mr. Speaker, in his book, the Last Child in the Woods, author Richard Louv reflects on the disconnection between youth and nature as a result of the growing use of technology. Video games, television and computers are keeping youth indoors and they are real concerns about the growing disconnect between them and nature. We see it frequently in the North. Children are spending less time outdoors. There is simply no place for them to plug in, so they do not want to go outside.

Richard Louv described this phenomenon as a nature deficit disorder. He coined this phrase as a result of research he carried out to determine extent of this disconnect and consequences of this behaviour. This research has spawned a movement where students and parents are taking measures to ensure that youth spend more time outdoors learning and playing.

“Young children learn through sound, sense and seasons of the outdoors,” said Mr. Louv, and the best way is through unstructured exploration and play. More and more educational materials and programs are being developed that focus on connecting children and nature in more meaningful ways. The Nature Journal is intended to provide

youth in the NWT with more opportunities to get outdoors, to explore, touch, feel, smell, and hear the sounds and sights of nature.

The Nature Journal can be used by individuals, in group activities, or by teachers to enrich classroom learning. The concepts and information in the journal are northern based and focus on northern ecosystems and biological conditions. A plan is being developed to distribute and promote The Nature Journal in public libraries and schools throughout the North. I hope that this learning aid will be of value to our youth and I look forward to hearing about its use on the land and in the forests of the NWT.