

Veterans and Military Families in America: Mission Outdoors

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"In war, there are no unwounded soldiers." -Jose Narosky

Executive Summary

This paper is a comprehensive review of challenges that active duty military personnel, their families and veterans face due to war and how and why outdoor recreation is an effective response. Even with increased services from the Veteran Administration and services on base, active duty military and veterans suffer the side effects from issues related to Post Traumatic Stress and Traumatic Brain Injury long after they leave the military and return to civilian life. An in-depth analysis discusses the problems and shows how and why experience and time in nature can increase the quality of life for the military world.

Military families also endure the hardships of battle and this has long lasting implications. Spouses and children often go through long periods of stress, anxiety and despondency. The outdoors offers a place for children and their parents to experience stress reduction and strengthen the family unit in a healthy, sustainable manner. Children are born into military families and have no say in their situation. Often boys with parents deployed show increases in disruptive behavior in the class room and girls show an increase in anxiety. Like all children in the United States, we are seeing an upward trend in obesity and diseases linked to obesity. Children spend up to eight hours in front of an electrical device outside of school. Exercise is a far better stress relief activity than video games or television. Time in the outdoors can address this health problem both mentally and physically. The Sierra Club recognizes the struggles a parent may have with their spouse at war to get their children outside. We aim, however, to help spouses, families, service members, and veterans gain the

skills and confidence necessary, as do a number of other groups, to get our military and veteran community outside more consistently.

Veterans have been suffering from PTSD and TBI since the Civil War, but really came to light after the Vietnam War. The suicide rate for veterans is 18 per day. Veterans also have high levels drug abuse including legal and illegal drugs and pain killers. In many cases drugs and alcohol were present at scene of suicides. This number is expected to rise in the next couple of years as more and more service members come home and cease to deeply. The United States learned their mistakes in “handling” veterans after Vietnam, but even with the new help from the VA, veterans are falling through the cracks.

Through research at the college level and intervention from non-profits, nature has the ability to save lives and increase the wellbeing of the military community and veterans. Non-profits range from adaptive sports to nature outings, with the goal of helping veterans and the military community deal with the side effects of war. This paper highlights thirty-nine organizations that reach out to the military community and veterans. Afghanistan and Iraq have been America’s longest wars and the wounded continue to come back to us. How will we answer this challenge? We will answer it by ensuring that military families and veterans experience the freedom of the land they defended, and this paper will show why this strategy is so important.

Population Demographics

Table 1: Outlines the demographic break down of our US Military including active duty and Guard and Reserve Forces, as well as the best available data on military veterans.¹

¹ DOD May 2009 “Military HOMEFRONT Demographics: Profile of the Military Community.” Office of the Deputy Under Secretary of Defense (Military Community and Family Policy)

Demographic Fact Sheet							
Demographic Variables	Active Duty		Guard & Reserve		Veterans		
	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	
<i>Total</i>	100.00%	1,405,176	100.00%	979,173	100.00%	21,900,000	
Women	14.30%	200,940	15.55%	152,220	6.85%	1,500,000	
African-American	17.00%	238,880	13.02%	127,463	10.50%	2,300,000	
Asian	3.60%	50,586	2.30%	22,490	1.18%	258,000	
Native American / Alaska Native	1.60%	22,483	0.75%	7,345	0.70%	153,000	
Caucasian	70.30%	987,839	66.24%	648,561	80.82%	17,700,000	
Hispanic/Unknown	10.70%	150,354	4.40%	43,084	5.02%	1,100,000	
Family Structure							
<i>Family Structure</i>	%	Number					
# of Family Members	100.00%	1,945,102	100.00%	1,148,607			
# of spouses	36.57%	711,375	35.79%	411,118			
# of total children	63.43%	1,233,727	63.96%	734,593			
Married	55.80%	784,088	48.50%	557,074			
Divorced	3.38%	47,495	2.80%	32,161			
w/children	43.70%	614,062	42.80%	491,604			
children of age 0 to 5	42.00%	590,174	27.20%	312,421			
Average age at birth of 1st Child	24.80	482,385	26.20%	300,935			
Single Parents	5.30%	103,090	9.00%	103,375			
On public assistance							
Age							
Under 25	45.30%	636,545	28.79%	281,879			
Under 35	34.90%	490,406	29.10%	284,934	7.76%	1,700,000	
25-64					51.14%	11,200,000	
36-41 & older	19.80%	278,225	41.06%	402,090			
Over 65	0.00%	0			41.10%	9,000,000	

“Newsroom: Facts for Features & Special Editions: Facts for Features: Veterans Day 2010: Nov. 11.” 11 Nov 2010. Web. 19 Aug 2011.

<i>Mental Health</i>						
# suicides per year civilian					100.00%	30,000
# of suicides per year				295	20.00%	6,000
suicide attempts per year					38.00%	11,400
diagnosed with Post-Traumatic Stress (from 2003 forward)					12.50%	
diagnosed with Traumatic Brain Injury (from 2003 forward)					12-20%	
depression (from 2000 forward)					14.00%	
Drug and alcohol use					27.00%	
other mental health issues						
Seeking help for mental illness	62.00% ²				62.00%	
<i>Other</i>						
Unemployment rates					10.30%	
Rates of arrests						1,159,500
Homelessness-Spent at least One Day Homeless (2009)						136,334
Homelessness- Single Night					100.00%	75,609
Homeless- Shelter					57.00%	43,000
					43.00%	32,000
Student Veterans						
College Degrees					26.00%	5,694,000
Non-Service Disability					10.05%	2,200,000
Service Connected Disability					15.07%	3,300,000
Benefits					13.70%	3,000,000
Employment					44.75%	9,800,000

² This number is for active duty personnel returning from OEF/OIF Tours of Duty

Introduction

This report is a snapshot in time of the American military and veteran community, the challenges and struggles they face, and how, specifically, the field of outdoor recreation is responding to these challenges. Starting with a demographic overview of veterans, military families, and then active duty, National Guard and Reserve service members, the report then includes the authors first hand experience of how the outdoors impacted his life and closes with a brief overview of various outdoor organizations working in the space. The appendixes include summary overviews of a number of the organizations discussed in this report.

The most recent data presented is based off 2009 numbers from the US Census Bureau and Department of Defense (DOD) documents.

The Military Family

The military has almost two million family members, most of whom are children. There are 1,233,727 children and 711,375 spouses among active duty family members. More than half of the active duty military is married at 55.80% and 3.80% are divorced, mostly with children. The greatest number of children in military families are between ages 0-5 (42.0%) and the average of a couples first child is at 24 years of age. A small portion of the military parents are single parents at 5.30%, while most divorced couples share parenting duties.

A somewhat disturbing trend among military personnel is the use of food stamps. Approximately 61 million dollars worth of food stamps were used in commissaries at military bases in 2008.³ This usually occurs within the lower ranks of the enlisted forces (E-

³ Mitchell, Bryan. "More Troops Relying on Food Stamps." *Today in the Military*. Web. 22 Aug 2011.

1-E5.⁴ Table 2 below shows a partial monthly pay scale for enlisted soldiers, all the way from Private (E-1), through to Sergeant Major (E-9) and from a Second Lieutenant (O-1), all the way through to a Major General (O-8).

Table 2: Military Pay Scale

2012 Monthly Pay Scale	Time In Service	
Pay Grade	2 years and less	8 to 10 years
O-8	\$9683	
O-7	\$8046	
O-6	\$5963	
O-5	\$4972	
O-4	\$4290	
O-3	\$3771	
O-2	\$3258	
O-1	\$2828	
E-9		\$4709
E-8		\$3855
E-7	\$2680	
E-6	\$2318	
E-5	\$2124	
E-4	\$1946	
E-3	\$1758	
E-2	\$1671	
E-1	\$1491	

Military families often find themselves facing adversity and challenges that most American families do not. The day to day stress of just being in the military can take a toll on a family with two thirds of all military families experiencing relocation to other military installations domestically and internationally on average every three years. This takes a toll upon the children especially when they are developing friends and learning how to socialize.

⁵ “2012 Military Pay Chart.” 15 Nov. 2011. Web. 2 Dec. 2011

The military also has a high rate of domestic abuse which has risen since troop's started returning from Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) in Iraq and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) in Afghanistan. Since the beginning of the Afghanistan operations there have been more than 150 cases of fatal domestic abuse and 18,000 cases of domestic abuse reported from 2001 to the present.⁵

The issue is when one of the parents deploys overseas, typically for seven months to one year. This is where many families see problems developing. The stress that comes along with a deployment can eat away at the foundation of a family. In 2009 3.60% of active duty officers and 4.30% of active duty enlisted were divorced. The average rate of divorce per year for civilians was less than 3.9%⁶ versus the high rate for active duty military both enlisted and officer.

Seventy nine percent of spouses expressed feeling a sense of isolation and loneliness and 57% of spouses reported behavioral problems in children while 60% of children had increased anxiety.⁷ In most cases boys had an increase in school fighting and behavior that disrupted the classroom. Anxiety was more prevalent in girls than it was in boys.

National Guard and Reserve

The guard and reserves is at 979,173 personnel and 1,148,607 family members with 411,118 being spouses and 734,593 being children⁸. The Guard and reserve component of the

⁵ Alvarez, Lizette. "When Strains on Military Families Turn Deadly - Series - NYTimes.com." *War Torn Part IV* 15 Feb 2008. Web. 22 Aug 2011.

⁶ "FASTSTATS - Marriage and Divorce." Web. 19 Dec. 2011.

⁷ DOD 2009 "Report on the 2nd Quadrennial Quality of Life Review" Office of the Deputy Under Secretary of Defense (Military Community and Family Policy)

⁸ *ibid*

military is different from active duty personnel in day to day life. Many joined the guard and reserves to get an extra pay check to support their family. Guard and Reservists are not full time military service members and their families rarely live near a military base or large concentration of other military personnel. After 9/11 things changed for the families and members of the Guard and Reserve as they have been repeatedly activated in large numbers. For many the OEF/OIF deployment cycle has become a nightmare for their families and service members. Families in active duty have a set income and it increases when a spouse is deployed. Guard and reserve members often have good paying jobs that may pay more than active duty wages. The cut in income for families hurts, but so does having a loved one gone for seven months to a year or more.

Including guard and reserve children in outdoor activities is very important because they are dealing with an intense situation without many of the same support structures an active duty family may have. Nature can be a key in helping kids stay happy and healthy and cope with the stresses of deployment.

Veterans

There are over 21 million veterans living in the United States. Some have used the GI Bill to get a college degree, some used their skills from the military to get a job and for others getting through one day can be a struggle. The Veteran Association (VA) hospitals are better prepared to deal with issues related to post-traumatic stress (PTS) and traumatic brain injury (TBI), but many veterans continue to fall through the cracks. It is estimated that 15% of active duty personnel and veterans have PTS versus 3.6% of the U.S. general population.⁹ Many fall

⁹ Tull, Matthew PhD. "Brain Injuries Among Veterans Linked to Mental Problems." 26 Feb 2010. Web. 13 July 2011.

through the cracks of care and go undiagnosed. It is estimated that up to 30% could have PTS in their lifetime. TBI is still relatively new and not understood as well as PTS. It is probable that 12-20% of OEF/OIF veterans have a traumatic brain injury. Both PTS and TBI have been linked to existing and future mental health issues decreasing the individual veteran and his or her family's quality of life. Depression often accompanies veterans with PTS, TBI and substance abuse. Approximately 14% of veterans dated from 2000 and beyond experience depression at sometime. In the end some veterans who cannot find peace turn to a deadly solution.

There were 30,000 suicides in the United States in 2009 and at best estimates, 20% of those suicides were committed by veterans.¹⁰ This means at least 6,000 veterans died in 2010 equaling nearly 18 per day which nearly equals every year the total number of deaths which occurred to US service members since the start of OEF and OIF in 2001 and 2003.¹¹ Veterans who have mental health problems are more likely to attempt suicide and in 2010 62% of military personnel returning from over seas sought help for mental health problems.¹² We can, and must, change this.

The National Institute on Drug Abuse reported that a study of Army personnel returning from Iraq showed 27% met the criteria for alcohol abuse¹³. Veterans also showed signs

¹⁰ Tull, Matthew PhD. "Operation Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom Veteran Suicide." 26 Jan 2009. Web. 13 July 2011.

¹¹ Tull, Matthew PhD. "Operation Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom Veteran Suicide." 26 Jan 2009. Web. 13 July 2011.

¹² Tull, Matthew PhD. "Brain Injuries Among Veterans Linked to Mental Problems." 26 Feb 2010. Web. 13 July 2011.

¹³ "Substance Abuse Among the Military, Veterans, and Their Families - Topics in Brief - NIDA." Apr 2011. Web. 13 July 2011.

Alcohol Use and Alcohol-Related Problems Before and After Military Combat Deployment Isabel G. Jacobson, Margaret A. K. Ryan, Tomoko I. Hooper, Tyler C. Smith, Paul J. Amoroso, Edward J. Boyko, Gary D. Gackstetter, Timothy S. Wells, Nicole S. Bell
JAMA. 2008;300(6):663-675.doi:10.1001/jama.300.6.663

of increased risk behavior (drinking and driving, illicit drugs use and prescription drug abuse). Another 20% showed that they required mental health treatment. Drug and alcohol abuse often accompanies mental illness. Mental illness, alcohol, depression and illicit drugs were present in 30% of all Army suicides from 2003 to 2009¹⁴.

The unemployment rate for veterans is at 10.3% for those who have served Post 9/11. Meaning 2.3 million of veterans are unemployed. This is higher than the national standard of 9.3%. The total number of homeless veterans is 136,334. Homeless veterans fall into two categories, which are homeless for one night (75,609) and living in a shelter (32,000)¹⁵. As percentages these numbers are very high, but when one looks at the absolute numbers, we as a nation should be able to respond successfully to bring these numbers down to at least the national average, if not far lower. While thinking that we can eradicate the entire unemployment and homelessness problems may be fanciful, we should be able to ensure that veterans are no more representative of these social ills than the rest of the general population.

Responding to the Challenge

Different generations of veterans have received different welcomes home, from the ticker tape parades of WW2, to the spitting and protest of Vietnam to an ambiguous homecoming for today's veterans. While many veterans have tapped into their considerable skill, leadership, and experience gained through hard work and sacrifice inherent to military service to become community, state, and national leaders; many veterans have struggled to make a successful transition from uniform to civilian life. This is highlighted by the rash of negative statistics

¹⁴ Maze, Rick. "18 Veterans Commit Suicide Each Day - Army News | News from Afghanistan & Iraq - Army Times." 22 Apr 2010. Web. 18 Aug 2011.

¹⁵ Maunz, Shay. "Unemployment Much Higher for Post-9/11 Vets." Web. 13 July 2011

described above that show veterans are more likely to commit suicide, be unemployed, homeless, or addicted to drugs and alcohol, when compared to their non-veteran counterparts. This is unacceptable.

Many veterans are simply not getting the care they need from the Veterans Administration Health Program (VA) and other institutions designed to help them. This is believed to have contributed to the high rate of suicide and suicide attempts among veterans. Many may have a sense of hopelessness and fear of an inability to heal from their mental and physical wounds, may not recognize they have issues that need to be addressed, or are not able to find understanding or reintegration into broader society. Many veterans and service members, steeped in the warrior tradition, and use to dealing with things on their own, may not feel comfortable reaching out for help, concerned this would violate a warrior ethos.

In response to many of these issues, several groups have stepped into the gap to provide outdoor recreation opportunities for military families, youth, and veterans. These groups believe, as does the Sierra Club, that outdoor recreation can be one of the leading activities that can help reverse the negative trends associated with our military and veteran communities while also giving an opportunity for military families and veterans to be active participants and leaders in their home communities. For service members and veterans, outdoor activities provide a sense of camaraderie, mission and purpose, as well as physicality in action that many service members may have not been able to replicate since their time in service or combat. For families, the outdoors creates opportunities for renewed trust through shared experiences and overcoming difficulties together as a family unit, in a fun, safe environment.

For youth, being outside allows kids to be just that, kids. Laughing, enjoying life and not being concerned with their other daily concerns of what makes them separate, or different from

many other kids up and down the block, while also connecting them to a sense of place, providing happy memories, and building the same set of leadership and teamwork skills the outdoors offers to families and veterans.

There is a spectrum of activities offered that range from rock climbing, hiking, and surfing to fly fishing and cycling. Some organizations center their efforts on getting veterans outdoors who are missing limbs, blind or have some type of physical impairment, while others focus on mental health issues and still others on simply getting as many veterans and military families outside as possible, regardless of disability. Whether the activity is team building in the outdoors or water skiing when you have no legs, these activities all seem, at least anecdotally, to positively impact all participants.

There is a growing body of research that is capturing the quantitative and qualitative benefits of outdoor recreation not only for veterans and military families, but for all people. The below table from Dr. Vella at the University of Southern Maine, highlights the good news in the data.

Table 3: The Science Behind the Healing¹⁶

Summary of Effectiveness of Adaptive Outdoor Sports Therapy (Rivers of Recovery)

By: Elizabeth Vella, PhD, University of Southern Maine, 2010

Psychological Symptoms	Improvement
Perceptual Stress	19%
PTSD Symptoms	19%
Sleep Quality	11%
Brief Symptom Inventory	35%

¹⁶ Vella,, Elizabeth. "Medical Research Study | Rivers of Recovery." 2010. Web. 9 Dec. 2011.

Somatic Stress	28%
Depression	44%
Anxiety	31%
Reduction in Guilt	14%
Reduction in Hostility	16%
Reduction in Fear	15%
Reduction in Sadness	17%
Reduction in Neg. Affect	14%

Veterans who were surveyed during this study saw a decrease in numerous categories related to PTS and TBI. Further research needs to be conducted to show with certainty that being in nature can help with their recovery from mental and physical injuries and perhaps even save lives. The Sierra Club and the University of Michigan will embark on this type of research in 2012. Other organizations and research institutions, like Outward Bound, Higher Ground, The University of Indiana, Indiana State University, Brigham Young University, and the University of Southern California, are all looking in on these issues. Continued and expanded research is vital to prove the effectiveness of nature and outdoor recreation as a key component to reintegration and healing for our military and veteran communities. Our outdoor places and wilderness, just like our veterans, need to be kept safe, so we, as a Nation, can continue to field a strong, healthy fighting force.

Section II- Benefits of the Outdoors for Military Children

Since the 1970's childhood obesity from the ages of 2-19 has tripled. Studies have shown that approximately 17% (12.5 million) are overweight or obese.¹⁷ Children who spent 2 hours or more inside watching television or using computers were at higher risk for psychological problems. Children also become more susceptible to disease, diabetes, attention deficit disorder, and anxiety disorder, myopia, cognitive/ mental disorders, asthma and other problems. Having access to green areas, participating in play, exercise and access to open spaces can reduce all of these medical issues. When children spend less time outdoors they have less knowledge about biodiversity, ecosystem functions, general wildlife and appreciation of nature. This lack of knowledge hurts future generations from developing environmental stewardship. Less and less schools are offering recess or they are insufficient in length. Studies show that when kids spend more time outdoors they perform better in the class. They have better attention spans and have less behavioral problems. Children who grow up in urban areas and areas of poverty have less access to open spaces in nature and parks in their neighborhood. Children on military bases often have similar access issues to playgrounds and other areas to play/socialize outdoors as urban youth. Poverty also plays a role on children whose socio-economic status is towards the bottom. Some parents don't have the monetary means or skill sets to take their children to parks, nature centers and open spaces. Children also have more supervised indoor playtime due to worries about crime, pollution, traffic, ultraviolet rays and injury. Studies have shown children require

¹⁷ Cleland, Crawford, Hume, Timperio, and Salmon are with Deakin University in Australia. Baur is with the University of Sydney in Australia. Cleland, V., Crawford, D., Baur, L. A., Hume, C., Timperio, A., & Salmon, J. (2008). A prospective examination of children's time spent outdoors, objectively measured physical activity and overweight. *International Journal of Obesity*, 32(11), 1685-1693. <http://www.nature.com/ijo/index.htm>

unsupervised play to develop their cognitive functions, such as social interaction with other children.

As discussed above, military children face these issues, plus the anxiety of one or both parents being away at war. The outdoors is, however, a place where military children can get away from stresses of life and feel the healing power of nature. Camp opportunities like *Military Kids Outdoors* and the National Military Family Association's *Operation Purple Camp*® are a place where children can get community support, learn leadership, make new friends and develop environmental stewardship. All of which can and should help to directly address the stresses placed on military families as discussed above. Through social outings, recreational trips, educational skills and meeting other children whose parents are deployed a web of support can be built for and by the kids. At the same time this promotes healthy children and ensures military youth are winning in the battle of child hood obesity.

Military children, unlike their parents are born into this lifestyle and have no choice in the matter. Their experiences may be more unique in many ways from non-military children and can separate them apart from the other kids in school, many who don't show empathy towards them, perhaps because they don't even know there is a need for empathy to be shown. Just as with veterans, there are groups who focus in on ensuring military kids are given opportunities in the outdoors and offer them additional support they may need to be a happy and healthy children.

The data shows¹⁸ how the outdoors can only benefit children in dealing with increased amounts of stress and anxiety.

¹⁸ Cleland, Crawford, Hume, Timperio, and Salmon are with Deakin University in Australia. Baur is with the University of Sydney in Australia. Cleland, V., Crawford, D., Baur, L. A., Hume, C., Timperio, A., & Salmon, J. (2008). A prospective examination of children's time spent outdoors, objectively measured

Veterans and the Outdoors

In researching this paper I have come across 39 organizations that help mentally and physically injured veterans heal through nature across the United States. Table 4 below shows the breadth and depth of organizations that works with the military community. These are only a small selection of organizations that reach out to active duty soldiers and wounded veterans. In the attached appendix, a snap shot and website for each of these organizations is provided for the reader.

Table 4: Summarization of Appendix 1

Organization	Type
Adaptive Adventures- Wounded Military Program	Veteran
Adventure American Legion	Veteran
AmpSurf	Veteran
Boulder, Colorado EXPAND program	Veteran
C.A.M.O	Veteran
Challenge America	Veteran
Farmer Veteran Coalition	Veteran
Gallant Few	Veteran
Higher Ground	Veteran
Hope for the Warriors	Veteran
House in the Woods	Veterans and Families
Hunts for Healing	Veteran
The Jimmy Miller Foundation	Veteran
Mission Continues	Veterans
National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic	Veteran
OASIS Adaptive Sports	Veteran
Operation: Military Kids	Military Kids
Outward Bound	Veterans
Paradox X-Sports	Disabled Persons
Phoenix Multi-Sport	Veteran
Project Healing Waters	Veteran
Project Odyssey-Wounded Warrior Project	Veteran

physical activity and overweight. International Journal of Obesity, 32(11), 1685-1693.
<http://www.nature.com/ijo/index.htm>

Sportainability	Disabled Persons
Soldiers to the Summit	Veteran
Soul River Fly Fishing	Veteran/Family Groups
Trout Unlimited	Veterans & Civilians
Total Outdoors	Military Families
University of Maine Cooperative Extension	Military Teens
Telluride Adaptive Sports Program	Veterans and Disabled Person
Vail Veteran Programs	Veteran/Family Groups
Veteran Conservation Corps: Washington State of Veteran Affairs	Veterans
Veteran Expeditions	Veterans
Veterans Green Corps Job: SCA	Veteran
Veterans Outdoors	Veterans and Families
Wilderness Inquiry	Everyone
Women's Wilderness Institute	Women Group

Since June 25, 2007 26,000 soldiers in OIF have been wounded; many from explosions.¹⁹ As discussed, there are many obstacles a soldier or veteran faces in returning to civilian life after service in the armed forces. It can be a difficult journey and for many life simply stops after they drop their pack, even if they are not suffering from PTS, TBI, depression, or a physical injury. Many veterans suffer from PTS, TBI, and depression. Some turn to illicit substances to ease their pain and forget about the daily grind of life. Navigating the world of the VA and its bureaucracy can be disheartening and some veterans decide not to go through with care. Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome and TBI often lead to other mental health diseases such as major depression, dysthymia and various phobias.²⁰ Those veterans, who have turned to the outdoors to look for a break from life and just to join a friend on a hike, are expressing that their transitions back home

¹⁹ Jan E. Kennedy, PhD; I Michael S. Jaffee, MD; Gregory A. Leskin, PhD; James W. Stokes, MD; Felix O. Leal, MA; Pamela J. Fitzpatrick, PhD. "Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder-like Symptoms and Mild Traumatic Brain Injury." *Journal of Rehabilitation Research & Development* 44.Number 7, 2007 (2007) : 895-920. Print.

²⁰ Jan E. Kennedy, PhD; Michael S. Jaffee, MD; Gregory A. Leskin, PhD; James W. Stokes, MD; Felix O. Leal, MA; Pamela J. Fitzpatrick, PhD. "Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder-like Symptoms and Mild Traumatic Brain Injury." *Journal of Rehabilitation Research & Development* 44.Number 7, 2007 (2007) : 895-920. Print.

are more successful. What happened seems that for many they found life and an avenue to heal while searching out adventure or solace, perhaps even without the intention of seeking out healing. This is believed to be from the parallels that outdoor activities may have with military service including a sense of mission (to the top of the peak!), a sense of physicality (paddle base the shore break!), and a sense of camaraderie and trust (your belay partner!).

There different are disciplines that veterans have used to connect to the outdoors and ultimately heal. All veterans are different and what helps them heal in the outdoors is as unique as the individual, but what does not seem to be unique, is that time in the outdoors does work!

Testimonies are the heart and soul of how fishing, hiking, rock climbing, adaptive sports and white water rafting help them come back from the darkness. What is lacking is a significant pool of scientific and empirical data to show others how the outdoors critically and positively impacts veterans. Higher Ground, OASIS and Outward Bounds both of which are adaptive sports organizations are working with universities to collect data that in the future can be used as a strong argument for the need of additional, even State or Federal funding to be used to support these kinds of programs for veterans and military communities. This research tests how stress is reduced through engagement in nature. These two organizations primarily use adaptive sports to help mentally and physically injured veterans deal with their injuries. Some testimonies show how important these activities are to their recovery.

This testimony comes from Outward Bound-

“...in all the programs, sessions, and events I have participated, Outward Bound's program has done the most in restoring my ability to function independently and to think positively... The unique mix of

physical and mental challenges, teambuilding, and retrospective exercise has helped me to think of myself not as a victim, but as a rescuer of myself." - Wounded Veteran

"Being around (the other vets) helped me open up my innermost thoughts and feelings and now it will be easier to discuss these with my PTS therapist and make it easier to get the help I need." –

Wounded Veteran

This testimony comes from Project Healing Waters-

"I would like to say thank you to the board members of PHWFF for your support and dedication to the men and women of the Armed Forces who are healing not only on the outside, but on the inside through your graciousness of time and money to helping us heal." – Wounded Veteran

Section III- Veteran and Military Family Outdoor Organization's

The time I spent at the Sierra Club I always felt there was some kind of stigma about veterans and the environmental or outdoor movement. The reason I felt it is because it does exist. Veterans are associated with social and political beliefs that do not always align with the environmental movement. I am not sure if this is due to ignorance, but I know that I certainly fit into this stereotype myself. Like Bob Dylan once sang though, "Times are a changing".

The Sierra Club forced me in some kind of subconscious way to face my veteran background. I had both an internal and an external struggle here. What I felt on the inside about being a veteran, getting outside, and the environmental movement, was very different than the external pressures I heard from fellow service members and non-veteran colleagues. In college I felt that I could not be both a veteran, and an environmental, or even an outdoor recreation activist. I thought the two couldn't coexist, but I was happily proved wrong. I like to think of myself as the

breaker of stereotypes and I think that The Sierra Club Mission Outdoors: Military Family and Veterans Initiative does this as well. I've always had the internal struggle of what it means to be a veteran in today's society. I did not intend on 'being a veteran'. As such, I did not pay attention to the external pressures. I tried to justify to people why veterans need to be a major part of the environmental movement, but I could never really form a concrete argument. The key element to the puzzle was the external pressure. At the Sierra Club I received external pressure from other Sierra Club veterans and employees. It helped me to see the whole picture because I was introduced to the main problem.

People today do not view veterans today as they did Vietnam veterans. There was no intervention from American society to help these men and women when they returned from war. They were simply forgotten. Veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan are targeted for help and rehabilitation, yet veterans are still suffering and much of the help is cosmetic in nature; kind gestures, with little substance to offer real hopes of integration or healing. The major piece of the puzzle that is still missing on a grand scale is nature and outdoor recreation. What better medium than the outdoor world to bring together veterans and non-veterans to work individually or corporately on the issue at hand?

Organizations such as Higher Ground and Outward Bound have been doing this for awhile and testimonies (See above) explain how the outdoors helps veterans heal from mental and physical injuries. Research is important to the future and growth of helping veterans heal through the outdoors. The work being done by these organizations are instrumental to grow programs that reach out to the wounded veteran community.

In 2006, the Sierra Club identified a gap and decided to close it. Military children face greater challenges than your average American child. As stated before military children are

born into this situation and have no choice in the matter. After helping to get over 50,000 military kids, families, and veterans outdoors since 2007 the Sierra Club broadened its view and started helping veterans to be able to help themselves in the outdoors. The emerging view that veterans also fought for public lands, clean water and air are true, but rarely spoken of outside of the Sierra Club hallways. We didn't go to war so major corporations could benefit and make profit at the behalf of veteran sacrifice. We went to war to fight for our land as much as anything. If our military families' and veterans' sacrifice is to be worthwhile, we need to ensure that we have a clean and healthy environment where our military families and veterans can recreate and form the skills and memories needed to successfully deal with the stresses of war.

Most of the programs researched in this paper only offer courses/outings for one week period or just over a weekend. Many veterans have voiced that after these amazing experiences that they cannot wait till the next event. A mechanism needs to be implemented where they can get themselves outdoors on their own and eventually take other veterans into nature. Veterans who weren't wounded in war or don't suffer from PTS and TBI need to become more involved and we need to ensure they have those opportunities. The treating of veterans through nature needs to become a self sustaining movement if we are to see reductions in suicide, depression and substance abuse. The Sierra Club will be launching a series of leadership development clinics and listening sessions to learn from the military family and veteran community how best to do that in 2012.

One final thought on how to reach out to the American public and break stereotypes of veterans is through a comprehensive multi-media campaign. We need to show America that while the veteran community is diverse socio-economically and culturally, they are a united front and can be outstanding role models to the broader community about how to serve, give back, and move beyond superficial differences.

The first part can be stories of veterans and the kind of work they do after leaving the military. Highlight veterans working in high tech green-jobs to farmers and how they help America move forward environmentally and economically. The next part should explain how we have our own potential Vietnam veteran situation on our own hands. At the rate OEF/OIF veterans are committing suicide and continuing to suffer, we have once again failed them. America's inability to think in the long term could fail veterans unless we address the whole problem, having a sustainable movement of veterans and civilians helping each other. Americans also need to be acutely aware that they are also responsible for the men and women who defend our country. Like they say in the economics world, "There is no such thing as a free lunch." Our Nation's veterans are our communities' veterans. We as a Nation owe it to these defenders of our freedom to ensure they are well taken care of; not just through tax revenue supported programs like the VA, but through getting involved as individuals in helping veterans reintegrate, and what better place than the outdoors?

Many of these organizations would be a good fit for the Mission Outdoors: Military Family and Veteran Initiative. Many of these organizations only work with mentally and physically wounded veterans. Steps need to be taken to make sure we can reach as many veterans (wounded or not), active duty personnel and families. Organizations that work to get military children outdoors are also high in number, but mostly work with ages 5-12. Military spouses and teenagers present a gap in services that need to be filled.

Mission Outdoors has a unique opportunity to reach out to these veterans and get them outdoors right away. Reaching out to active duty military and getting them out on outings through the Sierra Club or teaming up with Morale, Welfare and Recreation (DOD) could be a preventative measure and the first in giving these future veterans the tools to get outdoors and taking others with them.

Mission Outdoors ability to reach out to partner groups such as the Armed Services YMCA Blue Star Families, and others can provide military children that needed relief from the stress of having parents deployed. Mission Outdoors could provide volunteer leaders to help in activities. There are several women specific groups such as Women's Wilderness Institute, American Women Veterans, who could reach out to spouses. Advertising through big military publications such Marine and Navy Times could reach those who normally are left out of programs and activities. Morale, Welfare and Recreation could reach out to the entire spectrum of families, service members, and their children to inform them of outings and other activities that would get them outdoors. Similar partnerships need to be made with individual State and Federal Guard, Air Guard, and Reserve units.

Several pilot programs will need to be created to test the capacity of Mission Outdoors and any possible collaboration. Many of these are launching in 2012. Mission Outdoors is actively building its own capacity to run its own programs through its vast volunteer network and outings program. The key to accomplishing this goal is to figure how to reach as many veterans, active duty soldiers and families at the lowest cost. An example of this could be through a partnership with MWR or the National Park Service's emerging Post to Parks program. There would be very little capital exchanged between the Mission Outdoors and MWR. Mission Outdoors can provide the outing leaders and locations, where MWR can provide people and equipment. During pilot programs conservation education and awareness could be intertwined into the activities.

Goals & Outcomes

The over arching goal of Mission Outdoors is quite simply to save lives of mentally and physically injured veterans and provided quality experiences in nature for military families. The

Sierra Club being a grassroots activist and conservation organization cares deeply about protecting the planet and the nation our military and veterans community defended.

Mission Outdoors should look closely at the three strategic goals that the board of directors put forth; confronting the power of Big Oil and Big Coal, Movement Building and Building Strategic Alliances. Mission Outdoors has the ability to meet its goals while addressing all three of the board's initiatives.

Through outings, pilot programs and collaborations Mission Outdoors can address the health and environmental problems that arise from the use of oil and coal. Many of the objectives can be met through any of the future programs set up by Mission Outdoors. Veterans need to be made aware that they fought for public lands, the air we breathe and the water we drink.

The next step is to help create a movement within the environmental non-profit world. The Mission Outdoors programs can be the catalyst for change for veterans and military families. Through the programs they will find the healing power of nature, but also become aware of the environmental issues facing America and other countries. Building a movement of veterans and military families should be a goal. Veterans and military families have the ability to go between party lines and influence both parties.

Veterans and military families is a diverse group of people. The military is ethnically and social-economically diverse. Bringing veterans and military families into the environmental movement would address creating strategic alliances. The environmental movement lacks youth and diversity, veterans and military can fill the gaps here.

The main goal is to increase the quality of life for veterans who suffer from PTS, TBI and depression. This shouldn't become short sided to just meet Sierra Club goals, but can be met through

Careful planning. Mission Outdoors has the ability to meet all three strategic priorities and increase the well being of all Americans.

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