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Public shares ideas, concerns at America's Great Outdoor Initiative listening session

Godfrey, III. — Jo-Ellen Darcy, Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works, today hosted a listening session under President Obama's America's Great Outdoors initiative to hear from individuals on how to better conserve our nation's land, water and wildlife and develop opportunities for Americans to enjoy outdoor recreation.

The listening session, one of a series taking place across the country, gave people an opportunity to share how communities are meeting the challenges of modern-day land conservation and reconnecting Americans to the outdoors. Darcy was joined by Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar.

"Today's listening session, located near the confluence of the Illinois and Missouri Rivers with the Mississippi, brought to light the importance of conserving the nation's water resources and connecting with the environment," Darcy said. "The people living here are true environmental stewards and have a passion for our American outdoors. Their drive and commitment to the outdoors will serve as a foundation for the 21st century conservation agenda."

Prior to the public listening session, Darcy met with more than 320 youth at the National Great Rivers Museum in Alton, Ill, to hear their ideas on conserving and connecting with the outdoors. Darcy and the youth participated in a number of hands-on activities regarding water conservation and recreation.

"Working with the children brings the importance of the America's Great Outdoors initiative to the forefront," Darcy said. "Even at a young age, these children understand the need to preserve and protect our outdoor spaces."

Preservation and conservation served as the foundation for discussion at the public listening session, which drew a crowd of more than 150 from the Alton, Ill., and St. Louis Metro areas. Salazar said it is precisely such discussion that will help meet the intent of the Initiative.

"From the banks of the Mississippi River to the nation's iconic Gateway Arch, this region is home to many special and historic treasures," said Salazar. "We continue to build momentum with each America's Great Outdoors session and it is because of the passion and commitment we all share in protecting the places we love. Thank you for joining a conversation that will help shape a conservation agenda for generations to come."

President Obama inaugurated the America's Great Outdoors Initiative at the White House Conference on the Great Outdoors in April. The conference brought together leaders from communities across the country that are working to protect their outdoor spaces and focused on developing and supporting innovative ideas for improving conservation and recreation at the local level.

In a presidential memorandum, he called on the Secretaries of the Interior and of Agriculture, the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, and the Chair of the Council on Environmental Quality to lead the initiative, in coordination with the departments of Defense, Commerce, Housing and Urban Development, Health and Human Services, Labor, Transportation, Education, and the Office of Management and Budget.

For more information on the America's Great Outdoors Initiative, please visit: <http://www.doi.gov/americasgreatoutdoors>.

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