

COOPERATIVE
EXTENSION
SERVICE



College of Agriculture,
Food and Environment
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EXTENDING KNOWLEDGE *Changing Lives*



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When you
support
Extension,
youth engage
in the use
of science
of natural
resources
to promote
physical activity.



Caption The increased physical activity led to improved body image and self-esteem.

Extension Utilize Natural Resources to Engage Youth in Physical Activity

The Hike McCreary County program was designed to increase youth physical activity but has impacted the intellectual, social and emotional development of the participating youth.



Hike McCreary County challenged students physically as they increased endurance, intellectually evidenced by their engagement and completion of written assignments, and emotional and social development as they took pride in McCreary County and bonded with students with the same needs, interests, and abilities.

-Carol Jones, Gifted and Talented Coordinator for McCreary County Schools

The **McCreary County Extension Service** developed an educational hiking program for selected trails and providing information about the natural surroundings for the trails. In collaboration with the McCreary County Middle School Youth Service Center and Gifted and Talented Program, the program addresses the educational competencies in science, technology and life skills.

Trails consist of a total of 32 miles ranging from easy self-guided opportunities for physical activity to more advanced hikes with strenuous climbs and breathtaking views. Hiking, much like walking, provides great health such as: increasing bone and muscle strength, stress reduction, and over time lead to weight maintenance or loss (American Heart Association, 2014).

In preparation for the hikes, 30 seventh grade students learned trail survival skills, such as how to prepare their backpack, proper equipment, and techniques to minimize fatigue and back stress. While hiking the trails at **Cumberland Falls State Resort, Daniel Boone National Forest, and the Big South Fork National River and Recreational Area**, the students learned the folklore and history of the area, participated in forestry, geology, and archaeology activities, and practiced GPS skills. Students studied soil and soil erosion, water quality, plant life, reptiles and amphibians as well as observing signs of black bear and other wildlife. The experience sparked interest in related career opportunities including archeologist, forest fire fighter, park ranger, silviculturist, and historian and Extension agent.

During the hikes youth also learned about the importance of nutrition for physical activity as they planned and conducted their hikes. As a result of the educational hiking program, youth reduced consumption of soda, increased consumption of water, selected nutrient dense foods, and were able to calculate the amount of water and food required for their hikes.

After completing the program, youth reported being outdoors more often and reducing time spent in front of a screen. They also reported that they felt their bodies were in better physical condition, they felt healthier and had



Students develop a sense of pride for their county as they experience the natural beauty of McCreary County while hiking trails.



Experiencing natural resources increases learning and inspires youth to investigate and pursue careers in science.

higher self-esteem.

The Extension Service was assisted in this project by the McCreary County Development Association and the University of Kentucky Health Education through Extension Leadership (HEEL) initiative. Extension volunteers were trained and assisted in teaching the program.