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Rediscover Big Sky Country to Celebrate Father's Day 2010

Ah June in Montana! Recent rains have kept the snow-capped mountains green and the rivers rushing. The ranchers' fields are full of new calves and lambs - and backyard gardens are sprouting with promises of produce to come. What a wonderful time to get out and enjoy the Treasure State! What a perfect place to celebrate Father's Day with hiking, biking, fishing, golfing, or any outdoor activity that dads love to do!

"There is no better way to honor your father, grandfather, or children than to spend time with them," says Mike McNamara, Secondary Prevention Specialist with the Cardiovascular Health Program, Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS) in Helena. "Spending outdoor time together is not only good for your relationship, it's good for body and soul as well. We know that being active helps physical health and we are just beginning to understand how good it is for mental health and well-being."

An analysis from Essex University in England, published in the March 2010 *Environmental Science and Technology* journal, came to a rather surprising conclusion. The benefits of "green exercise" - being active in nature - began to show up after just five minutes. While all ages showed some benefits, the most significant improvements in physical and mental health were in young people and those with some mental illness, such as depression. Another interesting finding was that a blue and green environment, a natural setting with water such as a lake or stream, was even more beneficial for improving people's moods.

As a health professional and a father of two, McNamara could not agree more. "All the plans for improving the health of Americans include recommendations for increasing physical activity. In our state, we are lucky enough to have easy access to wide open spaces - thousands of miles of trails and rivers to use as our own outdoor fitness center. Most Montanans live within just a few miles of those blue-green natural settings that researchers see as so important to our physical health and mental well-being."

Mr. McNamara has some simple suggestions for celebrating Father's Day and the whole, glorious Montana summer with your family, friends, and neighbors:

- **Create a family activity plan.** Make some time every day to unplug the screens and go outside for a dose of green activity. If just five minutes can improve your mood, imagine what an hour will do!
- **Pretend you're a tourist and rediscover Montana.** Need some new ideas for places to go and things to do? Check out the multitude of outdoor activities at www.visitmt.com/experiences/outdoor_activities/.
- **Take a hike.** The Montana Wilderness Association invites you to go wild on one of 124 scheduled summer hikes or to head out on your own. Learn more at www.wildmontana.org/events/docs/summerwalks10.pdf.

"We'll be enjoying outdoor activities with our children as often as we can this summer," notes McNamara. "Being together and being outside in Montana are two of the things that we value most as a family."

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