



OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY  
**U.S. Department  
of the Interior**

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# News Release

August 28, 2008

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## **Hawaii Students Meet with Government Officials**

(Hawaii Volcanoes National Park) -- 32 local students had the chance today to share their thoughts on nature and outdoor recreation with a couple of high ranking government officials. In a dramatic setting overlooking Kilauea caldera in Hawaii Volcanoes National Park, Assistant Secretary of the Interior Lyle Laverty and Park Superintendent Cindy Orlando held a listening session with 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> graders from the Volcano School for Arts & Science.

Most of the children said they spend time outside almost everyday with family and friends. "I like to stay active and get outside," said 6<sup>th</sup> grader Taliesen Sumner. "The TV will always be there, but the land might not."

The Department of the Interior manages 500 million acres, or about 20%, of the surface land in the United States, and oversees a variety of water and marine resources. In an increasingly technical world, Secretary of the Interior Dirk Kempthorne, Laverty, and other department officials are seeking ways to help children stay connected to the natural world.

"Public lands, such as Hawaii Volcanoes National Park, belong to you, your families, your friends, and all Americans," Laverty told the students. "I want to thank you for coming here today to tell us why you enjoy spending time outside and also for giving us ideas on how to encourage other kids across America to get outdoors."

Some of the students proposed "adopting" an urban school in the continental United States. They would introduce the students to the beauty and wonders of Hawaii through pod casts and the internet. They hope to inspire the mainland students to connect more with the natural world both in Hawaii and at home. The partnership would enable the schools to share information about their respective areas with each other.

The students from the Volcano School expressed appreciation for living so close to a premiere national park and World Heritage Area. Many recalled favorite park memories such as participating in the Junior Ranger program or the first time they saw the volcano or a steam vent. Tim Fitzpatrick, a teacher at the school, said, "The park is an invaluable resource that contains examples of pretty much everything we teach in science. The park makes science relevant to the students and I think their appreciation for the park's resources fosters a responsibility in them to care for the park."

The listening session is part of the Department of the Interior's ongoing effort to engage the public. The information will be used to develop initiatives to help ignite children's interest in exploring the natural world.

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