


IRIS
Internet Research
Information
Series



Comparing Time Outdoors Between Boys and Girls¹

A Research Brief in the IRIS Series²

July, 2012

¹ Athens Research Group, Southern Research Station, USDA Forest Service, Athens, GA (H. Ken Cordell, Project Leader).

² The Internet Research Information Series (IRIS) is an internet accessible science report series covering outdoor recreation statistics (RECSTATS), the National Kids survey (NKSSTATS), natural lands research (NATLAND), and other human-dimension and demographics research (DEMOSTATS) related to natural resources. This research is a collaborative effort between the USDA Forest Service's Southern Research Station and its Forestry Sciences Laboratory in Athens, Georgia; the University of Georgia in Athens; and the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, Tennessee. <http://warnell.forestry.uga.edu/nrrt/nsre/IrisReports.html>

Comparing Time Outdoors Between Boys and Girls

The National Kids Survey (NKS) was started in the fall of 2007. This IRIS report features findings from the NKS using data collected up to early 2012. The NKS is a partnership between the Forest Service, the University of Tennessee and the University of Georgia. In a previous NKS IRIS report, a picture of the trend in amount of time kids spend outdoors was reported. As an extension of that previous IRIS report, the question addressed here is whether the trend in time spent outdoors is different between boys and girls. The previous IRIS report can be found at the following link:

(<http://warnell.forestry.uga.edu/nrrt/NSRE/IRISNKS/IRISnks1rpt.pdf>).

Also, research from the National Kids Survey is to be published soon in the *Natural Inquirer* which is found at <http://www.naturalinquirer.org/>.

Over the life of the NKS, percentages of youth spending four or more hours per day outdoors on both weekdays or weekend days have been shown to be larger than percentages spending one hour or less. The NKS has consistently shown very

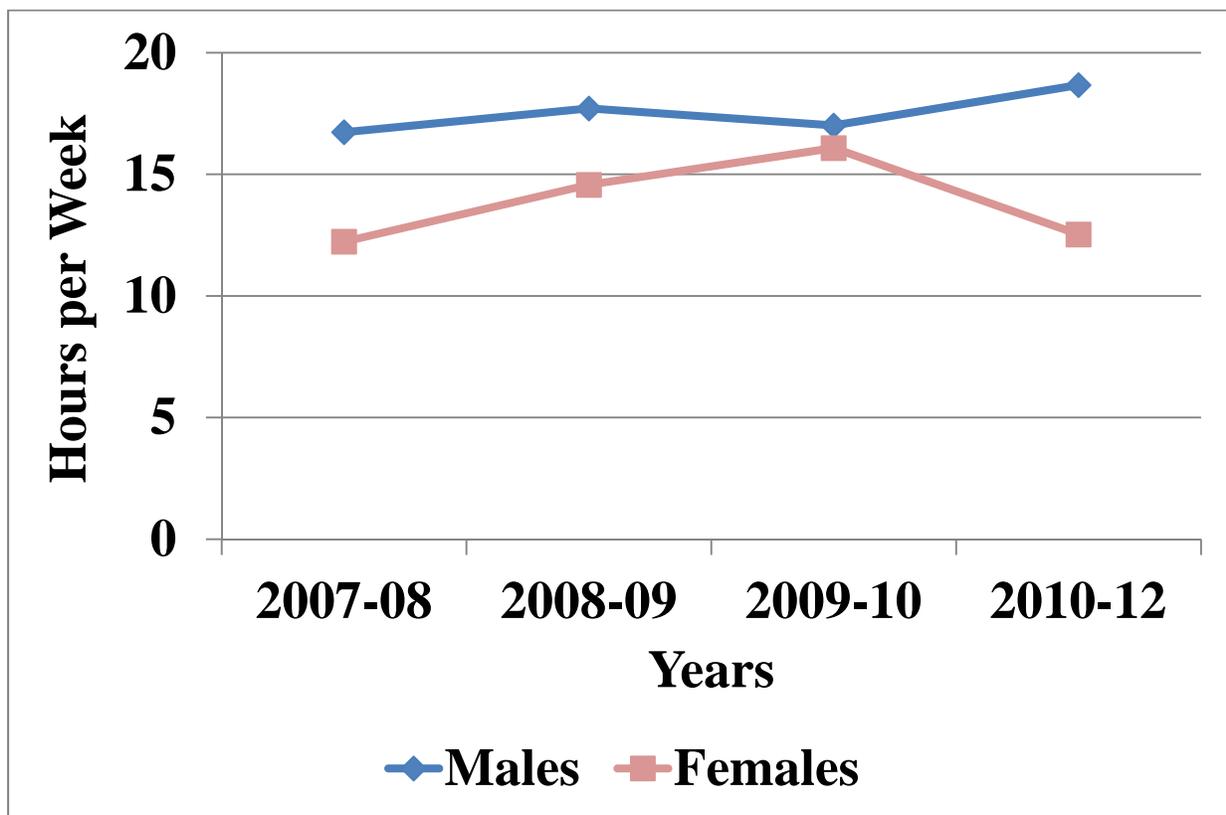


Kids outdoors in Greenville, SC, River Park, 2011. Photo by Ken Cordell.

small proportions spending no time outdoors---around 5 percent. As previously reported, for both weekdays and weekend days, it appears there has been a slight

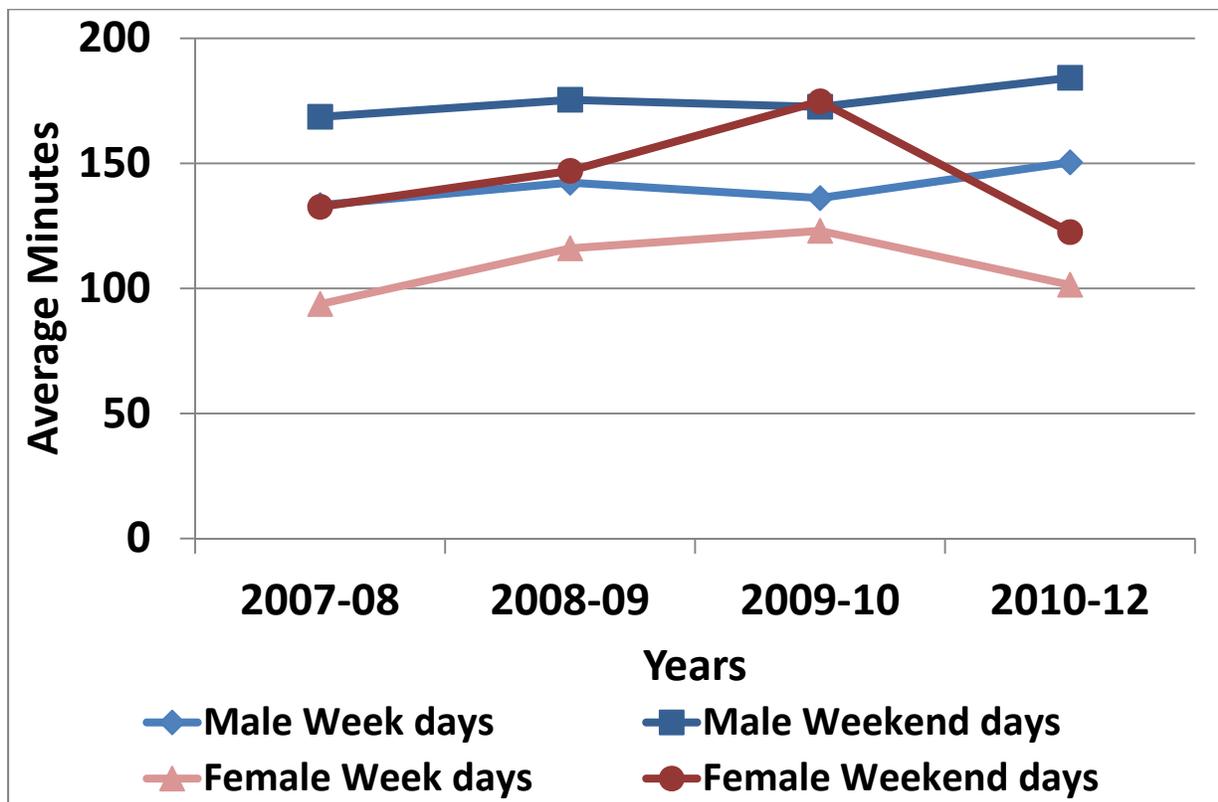
increase trend in time outdoors. However, what might we see when we show separately the trend in time outdoors for boys and girls (see line graph below)? Looking at survey data collected from 2007 to 2012 shows that there was a *modest rise in hours per week for boys*. There also was a rise in average hours per week for girls, but only up through the year 2010. This rise was reversed after that to become a decrease for the years 2011-12. During this last 2-year period, the estimated *average hours outside per week for females actually dropped back to its 2007 level*.

Trend over 5 years in hours spent outdoors per week by male and female youth ages 6-19 years



Overall, both males and females spend less time outside on days during the week than on weekend days (see second line graph below). From 2007 through early 2012, the trend in average minutes per male youth for both weekend and week days held fairly steady. But, while average minutes per day for girls showed an overall rising trend through mid-2010, average minutes per day decreased after that, and decreased sharply on weekend days. This downward trend is not welcome news to the numerous organizations and agencies which are sponsoring programs to get kids outside more.

Trend in average minutes outdoors per day for boys and girls on weekdays and weekend days across 4 time periods



In future IRIS reports that will look at results from the NKS, possible reasons for the decline in girls' time outdoors will be explored. It is obviously important to

know more about the possible drivers of these trends. For example, are the gender trends we're seeing related to the finding that more girls than boys spend time outdoors using mobile digital devices and reading and studying? Or could they be reflecting the fact that more boys than girls spend time outdoors participating in sports, particularly team sports? Are we perhaps seeing the lure of digital devices enticing girls more so than boys to spend more time using them indoors?