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I am a lead guide and After-School Program Coordinator for Rippleeffect, a local outdoor education organization. Over the past two years that I have worked for Rippleeffect, I have witnessed on a daily basis the impact that outdoor education has on our youth and I would like to share a few brief stories.

One day I knelt down on the shoreline at Willard Beach and observed green crabs with a group of students. We discussed how they are an invasive species to Maine, what impact they are having on native species and state fisheries, how we can properly identify them, and efforts underway to help this issue. One of the students then decided to focus his school project on green crabs.

I had worked most of the school year in our After-School Program with a child who I was aware was having struggles with school and I had noticed how much he was able to release energy and delve into a world of play outside. One day his mother informed me that he had been recently diagnosed with autism and she expressed deep gratitude for our program. We had provided an opportunity for him to build relationships and learn in an environment she felt was more supportive for his needs.

One notable week-long sea kayak expedition in Casco Bay that I led was with a group of all high school girls. It quickly became apparent how much social media and social pressures were causing high levels of anxiety and the idea of spending a week without their phones was stressful. After the first day of camping, all signs of makeup had been washed from their faces and they were forced to stay in the present moment and support each other through this challenging experience. We endured a storm, sang songs in the bunkers on Jewel Island to enjoy the echos, and slept out on the rocks under the stars on Crow Island. By the time we returned at the end of the week, they retrieved their phones and one of them looked at me and exclaimed "I actually don't want it back."

These are just a few of hundreds of stories I could share about the positive impact of outdoor education on our youth. To not enact this bill in support of outdoor education would be an injustice to our youth, and an inhibitor of the future health of our community.