Students Capture Sense of Place Through Audio

For the complete audio with media resources, visit: http://www.nationalgeographic.org/media/recording-soundscapes-zip-code-54451/

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Above: Medford, a rural community in central Wisconsin, is home to rocky bluffs, sandy plains, rolling grasslands, and diverse wetlands.

When you are asked to describe where you live, what do you say? Do you describe homes, shops, and businesses? Do you describe the people who live or work there? Maybe you describe landscape. All of these things help to define your sense of place, or what makes a certain place have its own distinctive character. One distinctive characteristic that helps to create a sense of place is sound. Every place has sounds that you might not notice, but those sounds help create a sense of place.

The students whose voices you’ll hear in these audio recordings collected sounds that defined their zip code's sense of place. Because sounds within a particular zip code change as its community does, these recordings serve as an acoustic archive of that place. These audio time capsules have also been preserved in the Library of Congress for future generations to experience.
For each zip code in NatGeo Education’s sense of place collection, you'll find three types of sounds:

- **Most Distinctive:** This is the sound that best represents a place. For example, at the beach this might be the sound of waves crashing.
- **Humans and Environment Interacting:** These sounds demonstrate how people who live in that place interact with it. In the beach example, this might be the sound of kids shouting as the waves lap at their feet, or the sound of a motorboat zipping through the water.
- **Symbolic of Change:** These sounds give clues about how a place is changing. In the beach example, the sound of heavy construction behind the dunes might indicate the development of new hotels or shopping centers.

**Fast Facts**

- Medford's "River Walk" follows the meandering Black River through the town. The Black River is a tributary of the Mississippi River.
- Medford has an industrial economy. It's largest employers are wood window and door manufacturers and frozen food manufacturers.
- The 1,000-mile Ice Age Trail passes through Medford. The Ice Age Trail follows the features that mark the furthest advance of the last glacier in Wisconsin, and is one of only 11 national historic trails in the country.