



## Learning Centers: Connecting the Public, Scientists, and Resources

Imagine a place where science and education are combined to preserve and protect areas of national significance. Imagine in the future, a park superintendent making critical resource decisions based on detailed sound scientific knowledge and ecological principles. Also, imagine a park where public understanding and support coalesces around these management decisions because they are defensible and preserve ecological integrity. Finally, imagine a site where parks are nurturing the next generation of scientists, educators, and the public that will guide future management and leaders through the 21st century.

To help create this future, the Natural Resource Challenge includes a commitment to establishing 32 learning centers around the country. Strategically placed in inventory and monitoring networks and tied together electronically, they will facilitate research and help educate the nation about our park resources. They will help to share with the American public the health of the national park system and the regions in which they are located.

After a national competitive process, five initial learning centers are funded. The five locations across the country are located in separate inventory and monitoring networks. Another eight are

planned to be established in the future (see back of page); by 2005, the hope is to create a system of 32 learning centers nationwide.

Conceived as public/private partnerships, these learning centers will support research activities, accumulate and synthesize information, and directly transmit that information and understanding to the public. Each learning center will provide computer access and laboratory, office, and dormitory facilities for visiting researchers. Staffing will be minimal and each learning center will rely heavily on partnerships for both start-up and operational expenses. Equally important, they will promote education and outreach through an education specialist who will work with area park interpreters and partners.

Although developed as a part of the Natural Resource Challenge, the centers are not meant to focus on natural resources only, but on opportunities for parks to become laboratories, libraries for research, and learning centers for *all* park resources.

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*The National Park Service cares for special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage.*

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*Lichen sample being collected for inventorying of species.*



## Initial Learning Centers

- Atlantic Learning Center, Cape Cod National Seashore
- Ocean Alaska Science and Learning Center, Kenai Fjords National Park
- Continental Divide Research and Learning Center, Rocky Mountain National Park
- Pacific Coast Learning Center, Point Reyes National Seashore
- Purchase Knob Learning Center, Great Smoky Mountains National Park

## Proposed For FY 2002

The following centers have been approved for future funding requests. Additional centers will be selected in the future.

- Acadia Center for the Environment, Acadia National Park
- Center for Teaching New America, Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area, with Channel Islands National Park and Cabrillo National Monument
- Jamaica Bay Learning Center for Applied Research on Urban Ecology, Gateway National Recreation Area, with New York Harbor
- North Coast and Cascades Learning Center Network, North Cascades National Park, with Mount Rainier National Park and Olympic National Park
- Great Lakes Research and Education Center, Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore, with Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore
- Urban Ecology Learning Alliance, National Capital parks
- Old-Growth Bottomland Forest Research and Education Center, Congaree Swamp National Monument
- Crown of the Continent Learning Center, Glacier National Park



*Historic McGraw Ranch in Rocky Mountain National Park (above) and the Historic Hagmaier Ranch at Point Reyes National Seashore (below) will be adapted for use as learning centers.*



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*Management of the national parks is improved through a greater reliance on scientific knowledge.*

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The Natural Resource Challenge is increasing NPS scientific understanding in parks all around the nation, from Maine to Florida to Alaska and the Pacific Islands. For more information about the Natural Resource Challenge, visit [www.nature.nps.gov/challenge/nrc.htm](http://www.nature.nps.gov/challenge/nrc.htm).

