



COASTAL ECOSYSTEM LEARNING CENTERS (CELCS) Update October 2006

The goal of each Learning Center is to educate and involve the public in protecting our nation's coastal and ocean ecosystems.

CELCS Background

The CELCS were first established in 1996. Plans are underway to celebrate the 10 Year Anniversary of the Learning Center Network at the December 2006 2nd Student Summit. There are currently 19 designated CELCS (22 facilities). The total CELC Network reaches an estimated 22 million people per year.

The U.S. Ocean Action Plan

The *U.S. Ocean Action Plan* (p.17) emphasizes the need for informal education in advancing ocean literacy and stewardship and emphasis on expanding the CELC Network. The expansion will be both (1) geographic in scope; and (2) scope of partnership activities. In support of the *U.S. Ocean Action Plan*, an Interagency Working Group on Ocean Education was established. Coastal America's Deputy Director for Education and Outreach, Marguerite Duffy, serves on the Working Group as both the representative for the White House Council on Environmental Quality and for Coastal America.

Geographic Distribution

Located in 17 States (AK; CA; AL; FL; GA OR; CT; MD; IA; MA; NY; NC; WA; IL; SC; TX; HI).
Coastal America Regional Distribution:

AKRIT (1)	SERIT (5)
NWRIT (2)	MARIT (2)
PIRIT (1)	NERIT (2)
SWRIT (2)	Upper Miss/GL (2)
GMRIT (2)	

California has two Learning Centers, as does Florida. In January 2005, the North Carolina Aquariums joined the network (NC is the first CELC with 3 locations covering the entire coastal State). Shedd Aquarium was designated in October 2004 as the first Great Lakes CELC. The National Mississippi River Museum and Aquarium was designated in July 2004, as the first inland river facility. In June 2005 Hatfield Marine Science Center at Oregon State University partnered with Oregon Aquarium as a co-partnership CELC, making this the first research center to hub with an aquarium. The Georgia Aquarium CELC is the most recent designation with a ceremony held May 25, 2006, as the world's largest CELC. The Gulf of Mexico Program has a goal of designating one CELC in each Gulf State and the first international CELC in Vera Cruz, Mexico.

CELCS Executive Steering Committee: A CELC Executive Steering Committee subcommittee was formed in September '05 to develop network regional initiatives that would impact nationally. The Committee is comprised of 5 CELC Presidents/CEOs. The Coastal America National Coordinating Office (NCO) coordinates regular conference calls and meetings of the Committee which suggests network proposals. The Steering Committee includes Ted Beattie, Shedd Aquarium; Jerry Enzler, National Mississippi River Museum & Aquarium, Jerry Schubel, Aquarium of the Pacific; David

Pittenger, National Aquarium in Baltimore; and Paul Boyle, NY Aquarium. Activities are regionally driven.

Partnership Activities

CELC activities and partnerships are results driven, advancing environmental literacy, personal stewardship and commitment. Through an MOU between each CELC and the Federal Partnership, Learning Centers provide access to their local community, education programs, and volunteers. The federal partnership provides up-to-date information and technical assistance, e.g., expertise on exhibits, grant information & education materials, research vessels, satellite time, workshops and training. Regional federal commitments are made during the designation of a CELC. Each Regional Implementation Team determines the structure and level of interaction between the CELC and the federal partnership (e.g. some work directly with the CEO/others with the education director). Regional specific CELC activities are highlighted in the Coastal America newsletter *Coastal America Update* and also the Coastal America Annual Report. Sometimes, funding is provided as available and appropriate for specific activities, (e.g., Student Ocean Conferences; Invasive Species Exhibit support; Marine Protected Area Workshops).

2005-2006 National CELC Network Activities

A number of national network efforts require funding. The Coastal America NCO seeks funding for network activities through the federal partnership (e.g. NOAA's Office of Education supported the Conference on Ocean Literacy Regional CELC Workshops held June 06; and multiple federal partners supported the 2006 National Student Summit on Oceans and Coasts). NCO notifies CELCs about federal grant opportunities and in March 2006 the NY Aquarium expanded its proposal to include the entire CELC network for an EPA grant (e.g. Project Power). Supporters also include the Coastal America Foundation which may submit proposals for grants on behalf of the CELC network. Individual Corporate Wetlands Restoration Partnership Chapters in 13 States also consider state specific project support.

Restoration Efforts/Partnering with AmeriCorps: To support successful CELC restoration efforts, Coastal America embarked on a Signature Project with AmeriCorps in 2005 to provide interested CELCs with volunteers for restoration projects. The Signature Project was expanded to include Coastal America at-large, e.g. RIT projects; CWRP projects. Twenty hands-on restoration and public outreach projects were completed throughout the Spring and Summer of 2006.

Outreach, Messaging, & Education: CELC activities encompass field trips and programs that meet or exceed state educational standards K-through 12; after school programs; and free choice learning programs. The network is seeking to expand environmental literacy through:

- Student/Teacher Summit on Cooperative Conservation Projects : The CELC Steering Committee proposed a 2nd National Student Summit on Oceans and Coasts as its top network priority project for 2006. There are 19 CELC delegations involved in the December 2006 2nd Student Summit.
- Shared CELC Initiatives: Several CELCs have coordinated proposals and initiatives on behalf of the entire network. Recent offerings include: the North Carolina Aquarium CELC and NOAA Sea Grant Aquatic Invasives Toolkit; and, NY Aquarium's Project Power.

Outreach with Network:

- The CA national office hosts a monthly conference call with the 19 CELCs Education Directors, and federal and regional federal points of contact. Each call includes a guest speaker and the latest information on posters, videos, training and workshops, which are also made available to CELCs electronically and through mailouts.
- Coastal America chaired a panel of 6 CELC Education Directors at the annual 2005 National Marine Educators Association (NMEA) conference. At the July 2006 NMEA National Conference in Brooklyn, NY, NCO chaired a meeting with CELC Education Directors to

advance network partnering, expansion, and projects, and awarded a 2006 Coastal America Partnership Award.

- The NCO and the CELC Executive Steering Committee co-chaired a CELC National Meeting during the AZA Meeting at Shedd Aquarium on September 15, 2005, hosted by the Coastal America Foundation. The purpose of the meeting was to identify priority projects and develop a strategy for network expansion initiatives. At the AZA September 2006, in Tampa, Fla, a meeting of NCO and CELC Directors was held to provide a progress/update on the strategy and to provide input into the Coastal America Principals' Subcommittee considering CELC formalization.
- A proposed Coalition for Ocean Literacy is moving forward with several coordinated initiatives proposed among networks: CELCs, Sea Grant, and COSEE. The first pilot project took place June 2006 regionally during the Conference on Ocean Literacy.
- A Coastal America 2005 Partnership Awards was presented to a NY Aquarium CELC team and a Spirit Award to a Hatfield MSC team. The North Carolina Aquariums team received a 2006 Partnership Award and the Seattle Aquarium a 2006 Spirit Award.

Professional Training Opportunities:

Over the past three years, the federal partnership offered the CELCs the same professional training courses offered to federal and state coastal professionals (e.g., NOAA's Coastal Services Center provided Marine Protected Area Workshops; and Designing Projects for Results and Evaluation). The National Aquarium in Baltimore put the course to use in their 2006 Conference on Ocean Literacy regional workshop which focused on evaluation and results of ocean and coastal literacy efforts.

CELC Network Initiative:

The CELCs support the establishment of the CELC as a network for the purpose of educating and involving the public in protecting our nation's coastal and ocean ecosystems.

The key objectives of the network are to:

- Use CELCS to reach millions of people
- Provide compelling experiences to the public
- Be creative and use entertainment to educate and inform
- Connect to people emotionally

To accomplish these objectives, the CELC network will:

- Develop consistent messaging based on Ocean Literacy Principles & Key Concepts <http://www.coexploration.org/oceanliteracy>.
- Collaborate with the federal agencies to develop the messages & network activities
- Involve the conservation community in network efforts
- Share best practices, exhibits and other information within the network
- Establish benchmarks to evaluate success.

For Further Information Contact: Marguerite Duffy, Deputy Director for Education/Outreach marguerite.duffy@usda.gov; or 202-401-9941.