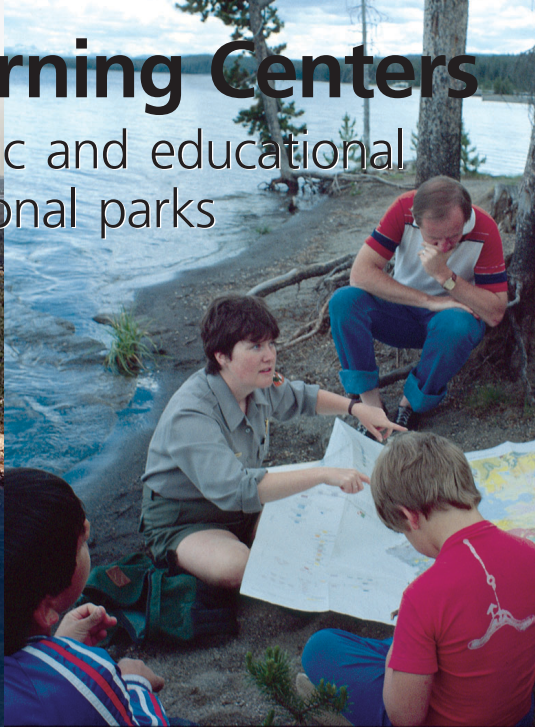




Research Learning Centers

Realizing the scientific and educational potential of the national parks



Research learning centers combine existing facilities (left) with the skills of researchers (right) and National Park Service education specialists (center) to develop and share scientific information for park management and public learning.

Imagine living laboratories where science and education are combined to increase our knowledge and understanding of the natural world and our relationship to it. Picture places where natural scientists conduct groundbreaking research that helps national park managers develop solutions to the challenges facing the seashores, forests, grasslands, deserts, and other natural systems in their care. In this setting, cultural scientists such as historians, archeologists, and ethnographers investigate the relationships of earlier inhabitants to the natural environment. Consider, too, that these sites are the product of partnerships between national parks and their neighbors, including universities, state agencies, and community organizations.

To realize this vision of the future, the National Park Service is creating a network of 32 research learning centers placed strategically around the nation through the Natural Resource Challenge program.

Research learning centers have been developed to facilitate research efforts and provide educational opportunities for everyone to gain new knowledge about national parks. Research learning centers are field stations for collaborative research activities, providing researchers with laboratory, office, and dormitory facilities. Each center's education specialist works with park interpreters and partners to make new information about park resources

available to the public. Research learning centers provide hands-on learning experiences for people of all backgrounds, connecting the student and the researcher.

The research learning centers have been designed as public-private partnerships that involve a wide range of people and organizations, including researchers, universities, educators, and community groups. Collaboration and cooperation helps leverage available resources to address the National Park System's current backlog of research projects. Research learning centers are cost-effective because each will have a small core staff, and operational expenses will be shared with partners. The actual facilities are housed in either adaptively reused buildings in parks or facilities in surrounding communities.

Thirteen research learning centers have been established and are located in different inventory and monitoring networks, ensuring that research activities are evenly distributed.

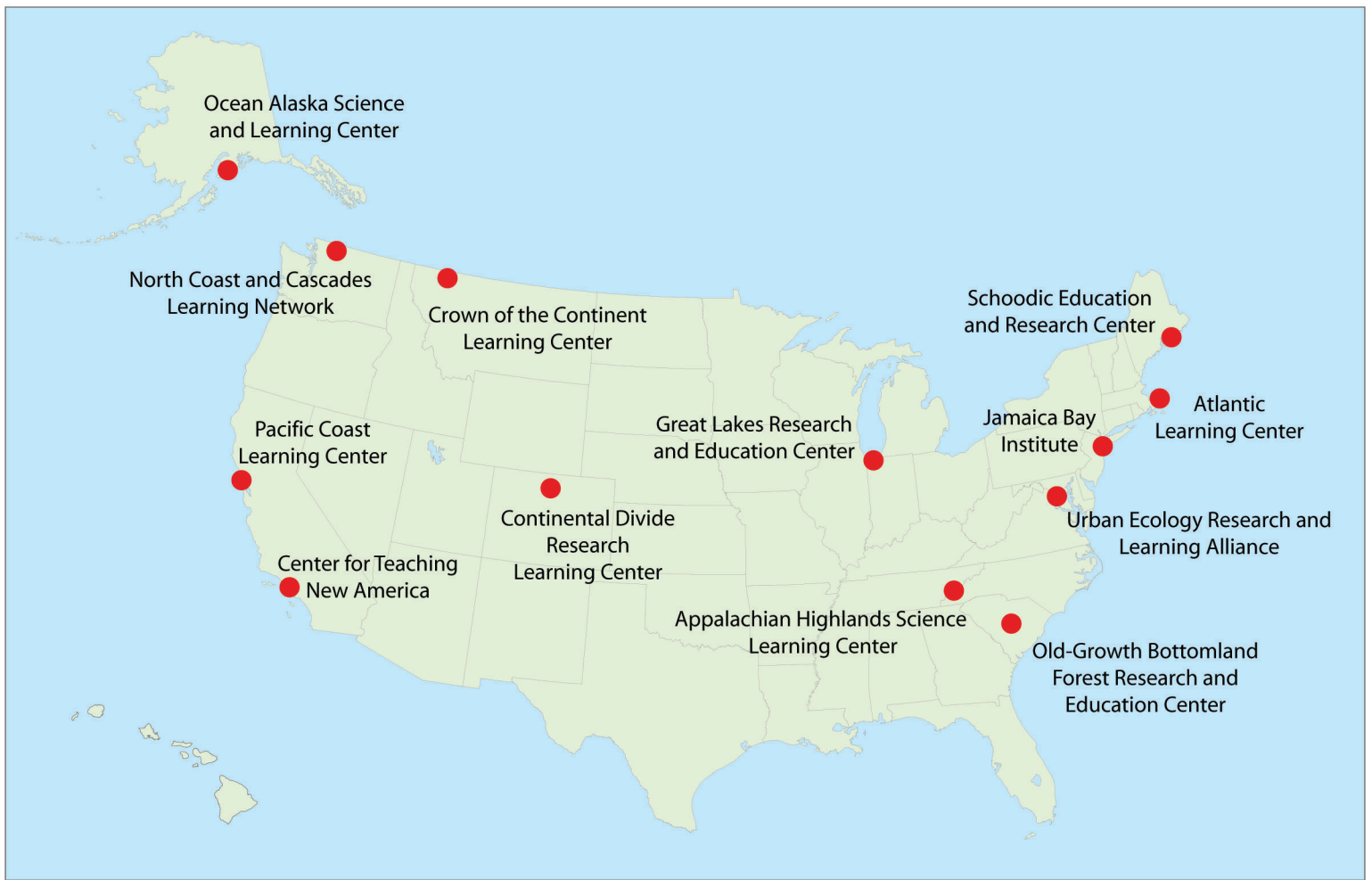
Research learning centers open the door for parks to become libraries, laboratories, and classrooms of tremendous national importance.

For information

www.nature.nps.gov/learningcenters/index.shtm

“National parks need to be thoroughly understood, not only for their beauty and their wildness and deep history, but also to realize their unique and vital contribution to science and education, particularly of the future.”

—E. O. Wilson, Discovery 2000 conference



Research learning centers established as of FY 2003

Schoodic Education and Research Center, Acadia National Park

Jamaica Bay Institute, Gateway National Recreation Area

Ocean Alaska Science and Learning Center, Kenai Fjords National Park

North Coast and Cascades Learning Network, North Cascades National Park, with Mount Rainier National Park and Olympic National Park

Continental Divide Research Learning Center, Rocky Mountain National Park

Great Lakes Research and Education Center, Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore, with Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore

Pacific Coast Learning Center, Point Reyes National Seashore

Urban Ecology Research and Learning Alliance, National Capital parks

Appalachian Highlands Science Learning Center, Great Smoky Mountains National Park

Atlantic Learning Center, Cape Cod National Seashore

Old-Growth Bottom Forest Research and Education Center, Congaree Swamp National Monument

Center for Teaching New America, Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area, with Channel Islands National Park and Cabrillo National Monument

Crown of the Continent Learning Center, Glacier National Park