

Advancing the National Park Idea: A Discussion of the Second Century Commission Report on the Future of the National Parks

NATIONAL PARKS SECOND CENTURY COMMISSION



National Parks Conservation Association®
Protecting Our National Parks for Future Generations®

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COMMISSION

National Parks Must Play a Prominent Role in American Education

The National Park Service, as a major education institution and steward of important authentic places that preserve and interpret history and ecology, must play a prominent role in American education—far beyond the original concept of providing for public “enjoyment” as designated in the Organic Act of 1916. The National Parks, as places for scientific inquiry, place-based learning, civic engagement, and life-long learning, should support a new learning society.



Recommendation

- The Congress of the United States should affirm in legislation that education is central to the success of the National Park Service mission, and that the Service has a fundamental role to play in American education over the next century.

Recommendation

- The National Park Service should enhance its capacity to provide life-long, place-based learning across the system.
- Lifelong Learning Includes:
 - Visitor Experience
 - Interpretation
 - Formal Educational Programs
 - Research

Efforts Should Include

- **Replacing dated, broken, and inaccurate exhibits**, signs, films, and other materials, with informational and explanatory media that exploit the **most effective available technologies** to present content that is current, accurate, and relevant, in formats that are as **accessible** as possible to the **broadest range of visitors**.
- **Breaking down internal barriers** between, and strengthening programmatic relationships among, the **Service's preservation, research, and education functions**.
- **Build Capacity for Interpretation and Education** (management, staff, resources)
- **Support culture of innovation**

Children on Lifelong Learning In National Parks

“It’s exciting to feel the nature...In a classroom you see pictures but here you use all your senses.”

“...sometimes you need to learn out of your normal system. To learn new things you have to explore. In class there are just text books. Here you can see and talk it out.”



Teachers on Lifelong Learning In National Parks

“There are a lot of kids who struggle every day with learning—lots of pressure to teach in a rigid way—not much critical thinking—here everything is connected, they can move, they can touch things, they don’t learn in one way—they all have an opportunity to learn in their own style—that just is not something that happens in the everyday classroom.”



Recommendation

- The Congress of the United States should promote stronger connections and greater partnership opportunities among the national parks and primary and secondary schools, colleges and universities, and other community-based educational institutions.

Recommendation

- The National Park Service should facilitate use of current and leading-edge technologies and media to enhance place-based learning, including social networking.

Elwha Dam Removal Project

The Power of Public-Private Partnerships

- Research
- Education
- Cultural Restoration and Preservation
- Natural Resource Restoration
- Native American Community



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Recommendation

- The National Park Service should cultivate close relationships with Native American peoples, and convey appropriate Native understandings of national park lands, waters, resources, and stories through educational materials and programming.