In support of basic research in national parks

National parks in the United States have a well-documented history of indifference, if not hostility, in support of basic research. Numerous external reviews have criticized the lack of institutional support for science, blaming it in large part on the traditional emphasis of the National Park Service on tourism and recreation management. However, according to Parsons (2004), recent efforts to improve the support for science in U.S. national parks have been most encouraging. These include a long-sought congressional mandate to support research; a major budget initiative to support scientific understanding and management of park resources, and to improve research facilities; leadership in the establishment of a network of university-based cooperative units; and partnering with private organizations to support programs that fund Ph.D. undergraduate and graduate students, postdocs, and sabbaticals in national parks.

Six programs are particularly noteworthy and highlight, in the words of NPS Associate Director Michael Soukup, "the mutualism between park management and scientists" (Soukup 2004) in attaining the objectives of both "science for parks" and "parks for science."

Canon National Parks Science Scholars Program for the Americas

By providing support to Ph.D. students throughout the region (i.e., Canada, the United States, Mexico, the countries of Central and South America, and the countries of the Caribbean), the Canon National Parks Science Scholars Program for the Americas strives to develop the next generation of scientists working in the fields of conservation, environmental science, and national park management. The program is a collaboration among Canon U.S.A., Inc., the American Association for the Advancement of Science, and the U.S. National Park Service. More information is available at http://www1.nature.nps.gov/canonscholarships/2004_App_Guide.htm.

Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Units (CESUs)

As part of a network of cooperative research units established to provide research, technical assistance, and education to park managers, each CESU is structured as a working collaboration among federal agencies and universities. The network provides resource managers with scientific research, technical assistance, and education. More information is available at http://www.cesu.org/cesu/.

GeoScientists-in-the-Parks (GIP)

Facilitated through the GIP Program, experienced earth science professionals and students work with park staffs to understand and protect geologic processes and features in the National Park System. The range of needs that GIPs address are fundamental research, synthesis of scientific literature, mapping, GIS analysis, inventorying, site evaluations, developing brochures and informative media presentations, and educating staffs. More information is available at http://www2.nature.nps.gov/geology/gip/.

National Parks Ecological Research (NPER) Fellowship Program

Through funding from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the National Park Service, National Park Foundation, and Ecological Society of America host the NPER Fellowship Program, which encourages and supports outstanding post-doctoral research in ecological sciences related to the flora of the U.S. National Park System. Each year, up to three fellowships are granted to researchers who have recently completed their Ph.D. More information is available at http://esa.org/nper/.

Research Learning Centers

The National Park Service developed Research Learning Centers to facilitate research efforts and provide educational opportunities for all people to gain new knowledge about national parks. These centers are places where science and education come together to preserve and protect areas of national significance. They have been designed as public-private partnerships that involve organizations and individuals including researchers, universities, educators, and community groups. More information is available at http://www1.nature.nps.gov/learningcenters/.

Sabbatical in the Parks

The National Park Service created the Sabbatical in the Parks program to assist in arranging faculty sabbaticals to conduct research and other scholarly activities in the National Park System. Outcomes are usable knowledge for NPS management and advancement in science and human understanding. More information is available at http://www1.nature.nps.gov/Sabbaticals/. *—K. KellerLynn*

References

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