

Field Stations in National Parks: Opportunities and Challenges

Ryan Tachibana

DAN WAKELEE, California State University at Channel Islands, played a major role in establishing a university research station on Santa Rosa Island, Channel Islands National Park. The research station is equipped with eight bedrooms, three bathrooms, a fully functioning kitchen, onsite laundry facilities, and can sleep up to thirty individuals. The research station operates on a five-year renewable lease. The research station's mainly provides research and educational opportunities for CSU Channel Island students, but also caters to Channel Islands National Park staff and individuals conducting research on the island. In partnership with Channel Islands National Park, students have the opportunity to generate data that will be used to inform management decisions on the island. Students are currently working with the park to monitor changes on the island caused by the recent removal of deer and elk. Some of the difficulties that the CSU field station have faced are overcoming transportation barriers, establishing long-term projects, keeping up with demand for expansion and acquiring long-term funding.

Michael Stevens is the director of Utah Valley University's Capitol Reef National Park research station. The facility was designed with sustainability in mind to utilize natural sunlight and heat, while being equipped with running water, an onsite water treatment center, off-grid solar generation, classrooms, common areas, and can sleep up to 24 individuals. The research station is committed to providing engaged learning and research opportunities for undergraduate students. The research station records visitation data regarding changes in users' environmental ethics during their stay. UVU's research station is funded by the university and operates on a five-year lease agreement with the National Park System.

Becca Fenwick, director of UC Merced's Yosemite field station, is working to provide students, researchers and the general public with educational opportunities centered around science and art in an outdoor setting. The Yosemite field station is part of the Sierra Nevada Research Institute, the world's largest field station network, according to Becca. The field station hosts UC Merced's Yosemite Leadership Program, a two-year Environmental Leadership Program, and Yosemite Environmental Science Research Training, a 10-week summer program for students to complete individual research projects. In addition, the field station serves as a facility for Adventure Risk Challenge a year-round, non-profit program that provides weekend retreats and SAT

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and college application workshops for underserved youth. With such a broad range of uses the research center operates throughout the year.

Tom Arsuffi is the director of Texas Tech University's Llano River field station. The Llano River field station is not located on National Park Service land, and once served as army barracks. The university received \$7 million of funding from public and private organizations and grants. The research station is currently hosting environmental events and serves as a research facility for Texas Tech students. The university has a partnership with the USGS South Central Climate Center and the National Park Service Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program. Currently, the field station is focusing on fire recovery and prevention tactics, bridging the environmental literacy gap and working on establishing relationships with nearby ranchers and landowners. One of the unique obstacles faced by the Llano River field station is the dangers associated with its proximity to the Rio Grande. Armed guards must accompany students and researchers working in nearby rattlesnake canyon.

Reflection

Speakers mentioned how current statistics show that national park visitation rates are on the decline. This has many people worried about the fate of America's greatest outdoor resource. Partnerships between universities and the National Park Service would provide ways to foster continuous generations of park goers. Mature relationships between universities and the NPS would increase the number of research stations, creating a valuable network and scientific database for students and professionals. An increase in research stations will provide more students with higher learning opportunities, potentially creating a stronger work force. This will also address the difficulties of obtaining land and the need for long-term land leases. Long-term leases will make it easier for universities to acquire the funding needed to manage research stations from investors. Partnerships between the NPS and universities provide valuable resources for everyone.