

Environmental Learning Parks

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Discovering local fauna at the Urban Ecology Center.

<http://www.urbanecologycenter.org/>

Environmental learning parks are a developing and widely defined type of open space. From pristine untouched wilderness areas, to damaged natural sites and small urban lots, environmental learning parks cover a wide variety of subjects and sizes.

The primary focus of environmental learning parks is to connect people to the natural environment. Issues such as plant diversity, animal habitat, sustainable building, wetlands, stream ecology, macro invertebrates and much more can all be related to issues of water, soil and air quality and in return can be related to our own lives.

Environmental parks should cater to everyone. Most often school children are the primary focus of environmental learning parks. However it is important to provide opportunities for people to connect with the natural environment. All ages, genders, ethnicity, and economic backgrounds should be addressed.

In developing an environmental learning park it is important to keep in mind the location of the park in relation to where people live. Parks closer to a person's home have a greater chance of connecting a person to that place. Environmental learning parks are also very effective on or near school grounds.



<http://www.naturalearning.org/walnutcreek.html>

“To keep alive his inborn sense of wonder [a child] needs the companionship of at least one and mystery of the world we live in.” - Rachel Carson



Context of an Environmental Learning Park

Environmental learning parks can fit into a wide variety of spaces. There are however several important factors that should be considered.

1) Connection to the natural environment.

This can involve a wide variety of elements such as, ponds, wetlands, forests, creeks, lakes, rivers, ecosystems, and watersheds.

2) Links to the community.

It is important to have some environmental learning parks closely linked to the community. While some parks may involve a whole watershed or ecosystem, smaller more local parks create a personal connection for people.

3) Variety of sizes and uses.

Environmental learning parks should work together to provide a wide variety of sites and uses. Instead of repeating or competing curriculums and topics, environmental parks can work more effectively strung together to form a web of environments, users and opportunities.

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Stuyvesant Cove Park, NY

Located on the East River on a narrow two acre piece of land, Stuyvesant Cove Park is a small space with in the built environment. Surrounded by high apartment buildings, parking garages, gas stations and FDR Drive, it is a tiny but important environmental learning park.

Stuyvesant Cove Park was opened in 2002. It is managed by Community Environmental Education Center (CEC), who are a non profit company who provide maintenance to the site in exchange for the operation of an environmental education center that exists on the site.

The goal of Stuyvesant Cove Park is to make connections between peoples' choices and their effect on the world they live in. Concerned with the idea that “the Environment” is viewed as existing somewhere outside of the urban realm, the park aims to demonstrate and teach that “the Environment” is all around us.

Stuyvesant Cove Park and the CEC provide workshops for school children, landlords and tenants, and professional developers.

The site is landscaped with drought tolerant native species. There is an esplanade along the river and pedestrian and bike paths that connects the park with the larger trail system around the edge of Manhattan. The park also contains the first ever solar powered building in New York city.

<http://www.cecenter.org/schistory.php>

adult who can share it, rediscovering with him the joy, excitement

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Elements of an Environmental Learning Park

1) Natural Environmental Experience

An environmental learning park should connect people to the natural environment. Streams, wetlands, ponds, lakes, shorelines, beaches, and forests are some of the elements that can be used to connect people to the natural environment.

2) Learning Center

The learning center has become common element for environmental learning parks. A center can be a small shelter or an overnight facility. They can serve as classrooms, places to get out of the weather, equipment storage and other functions.

3) Modeling of Sustainable Development

One of the goals of environmental learning parks is to make a connection between a persons life and the natural environment. By modeling sustainable development practices, participants can better understand how these techniques can be applied to their own lives. Some examples are; sustainable building, green roofs, rain water harvesting, organic gardening, solar power, and composting.

4) Recreation Opportunities

Environmental learning parks should promote a healthy lifestyle. A range of compatible site activities, helps promote physical activity. Some of the activities can be walking, biking, canoeing, bird watching, and gardening.

5) Stewardship

Opportunities for stewardship are an important part of an environmental learning park. Creating a sense of ownership among users and community members strengthens the connection between people and place.

6) Partnership

Many environmental learning parks develop partnerships. These partnerships are developed with like-minded, non profit organizations who help with maintenance, facilitation and providing programs at the site.

7) Educators

Environmental learning parks offer a wide variety of programs and courses. These can be facilitated by paid staff, interns or volunteers.



<http://www.urbanecologycenter.org/>



<http://www.cecenter.org/schistory.php>



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"We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as love and respect." - Aldo Leopold



<http://www.urbanecologycenter.org/>

Funding Opportunities

1) Grants

Environmental Learning Parks use grants for part of their funding. There are several different approaches that they can use for acquiring grants. First, environmental learning parks can apply for grants related to; environmental education, environmental restoration and protection, sustainable building and landscape practices, and grants targeting specific populations such as inner city youth. Second, there are several different organizations that environmental learning parks can look towards for contributing grants. These are; philanthropic foundations, corporate foundations, city, county, state, and federal agencies.

2) Program Fees

Many environmental learning parks rely on program fees for funding. These fees can be applied as an entrance / user fee. They can also be applied towards specific programs offered at the site.

3) City, County, State and Federal Funding

Environmental learning parks often are located on city, county, state or federal land. These agencies contribute to the budget or acquisition of environmental learning parks.

4) Donations

Donations are a common method of acquiring funds for environmental learning parks. They can be in the form of individual donations or businesses and corporate donations.



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a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with

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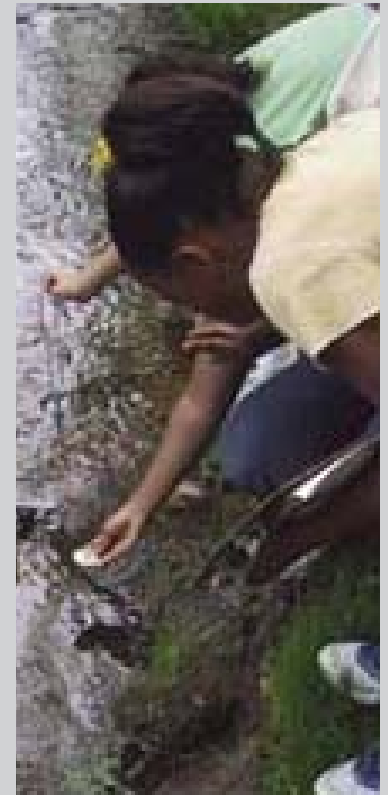
Riverside Park, Milwaukee, WI

Located along the Milwaukee River, Riverside Park was a popular spot for swimming, picnicking and boating. The park was abandoned in 1991 when the Milwaukee river became to polluted and visitors no longer attended the site.

The Urban Ecology Center was started when Dr. Else Ankel, an environmental scientist working at a nearby school began taking kids and volunteer teachers to the site to teach ecology lessons.

A neighborhood based and non-profit community center, the Urban Ecology Center; works to provide environmental science programs to neighbor schools, preserves and enhances the natural resources of riverside park, promotes environmental awareness in the community, and protects the Milwaukee river.

The Urban Ecology Center provides a host of programs for the community. There is Neighborhood Environmental Education Project, which serves over 10,000 students each year, exploring the ecology of the local area. The Citizen Science Program, collaborates with universities on research related to the local environment. Adult lectures, workshops, and discussions focus on local environmental issues, environmental information, natural history, and ways to live lightly on the earth. Urban Adventures focusses on nature based outings such as rock climbing, hiking and kayaking. Community programs such as Urban Stargazers, Vegetarian Potlucks, and an Urban Ecology Camera Club are also provided. There are also stewardship programs, weekend family and youth programs, and a summer youth camp.



<http://www.urbanecologycenter.org/>

"To cherish what remains of the Earth and to foster its renewal is our only legitimate hope



<http://www.naturalearning.org/walnutcreek.html>

Urban Wetland Educational Park, Raleigh North Carolina

The Mission of the Walnut Creek Urban watershed Education Park is to promote understanding and protection of an urban wetland, enhance community pride, and encourage economic development. The park provides an accessible quiet zone for commuting with nature. It preserves the natural beauty of the wetland, protects the habitat of numerous species, and lifts the spirits of those who visit through educational and recreational experiences.

Walnut Creek is located in the most urban region of the Neuse River Watershed. The Walnut Creek Corridor is a key link in Raleigh's "green infrastructure. Because of issues such as landscape fragmentation, federal water quality mandates, endangered species protection, public health concerns, urban revitalization and sustainable development, open space preservation has become an important issue

The Urban Wetland Educational Center / Walnut Creek 2000 is designed to address each of the previous issues. This project was started by Partners for Environmental Justice (PEJ) and has four main objectives.

1. To reduce flooding and promote land clean up. This will help raise property values and improve the local businesses.
2. To develop an urban wetland educational park
3. Beautify Hammond Pond.
4. To provide clean water for those living downstream and reduce problem chemicals in North Carolina's estuaries.



<http://www.naturalearning.org/walnutcreek.html>

The Effects of Playing and Learning in Natural Settings

- Stimulates all aspects and stages of child development.
- Offer multi-sensory experiences.
- Stimulate informal play experiential learning, and natural learning cycles.
- Stimulate imagination and creativity in a special, boundless way.
- Integrate children by age, ability, ethnic background.
- Help children feel good about themselves. Enhance self-esteem.
- Offer children a feeling of "intense peace."
- Center children in the environment where they live.
- Help children understand realities of natural systems.
- Demonstrate the principle of cycles and processes.
- Teach that nature is regenerative.
- Support interdisciplinary, environmental education curricula.
- Provide flexible and forgiving settings.
- Aesthetically appealing to all people.

* <http://www.naturalearning.org/effectofplay.html>

of survival.” - Wendell Berry

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Runner at Stuyvesant Park, NY
<http://www.asla.org>

Resources

<http://www.naturalearning.org/walnutcreek.htm>

<http://www.urbanecologycenter.org/>

<http://www.cecenter.org>

<http://www.asla.org>

The Sand Point Magnuson Park Outdoor Learning Laboratory: Report of the Environmental Education Program Steering Committee, October 2003, Cedar River Group and Sheldon & Associates, Inc.

Foss, Diana, Creating A School Habitat