

ALWAYS THE JOURNEY, NEVER THE DESTINATION.

—SIMON RATTLE

Celebrating our 30 year journey to advance parks, public lands, and experiences for all people.

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A Trail Map to 30 Years

Indiana University formed the National Center on Accessibility (NCA) and Eppley Institute for Parks and Public Lands (Eppley) to implement research, training, and technical assistance to advance knowledge and improve quality of experience for the public in these spaces. The first directors, James Ridenour at Eppley, and Gary Robb at NCA, were engaged leaders who helped develop the initial operational profiles for the units. A partnership model utilizing grants and contracts funded the cooperative and public benefitting missions of both NCA and Eppley. Projects included:

- Accessibility training and assessments for the National Park Service (NPS).
- Create standards for NPS training in design, development, competency-based learning and distributed education.
- Training needs assessments in various NPS career fields.
- Created and hosted the first NPS online satellite training sessions.
- Public engagement in the development of the Monon Trail in Indianapolis.
- Local agency system master plans for Indy Parks, Wabash Parks, St. Joseph County Parks, and Bloomington Parks.
- Research on swimming pool accessibility which became standards for the (ADA) and the (ABA) Standards.
- Merged with the Great Lakes Park Training Institute, the oldest continuous training program in the nation.

2001-2010

Eppley experienced significant growth with the NPS and other organizations around the nation and world. Jim Ridenour retired in 2001; Eppley Assistant Director Steve Wolter was selected to lead the Eppley Institute for Parks and Public Lands. Eppley was able to continue its collaborations in:

- Deploying NPS Facility Management Software System (FMSS) training nationally ending in 2022.
- Implementing the NPS Fundamentals New Employee Onboarding Program ending in 2009.
- Development of NPS Facility Management Program classroom training for FMSS, FCAS, and the first online courses for facility management, ending in 2022.
- Leading the NPS succession management program for facility managers, the Facility Management Leadership Program ending in 2023.
- Creating standardized “train the trainer” for NPS seasonal interpreters which evolved to

an online learning system for interpreters hosted by Eppley ending in 2014.

- Developing six course concept for NPS resource management and protection evolving to the Interdisciplinary Resource Protection and Law classroom course ending in 2012.
- Deployment of marketing and online courses for the NPS Planning, Environmental, and Public Comment webtool (PEPC) through 2017.
- Building and hosting various NPS training efforts including Focus, PMIS, Structural Fire, QABECS, New Superintendent’s Academy, Special Park Uses First Amendments, Partnership Program Training Needs Analysis, National Trainer Development Program, Interdivisional Chiefs Leadership Training Needs Assessment, Implementing Park Science, HR Skill Gap Analysis, Training Strategic Plan, and Concession Management courses through 2019.

In 2006, the International Federation of Park and Recreation Administration (Ifpra) sought Eppley’s assistance in creating an international certification program for park and recreation managers which evolved to include certification programs in Mexico, South Africa, and France, and other countries still in use today (2023).

In 2007, the first NCA Director Gary Robb retired, and Dr. Sherril York was named the second Director of the NCA. NCA continues its work with the NPS and expands to include expert accessibility technical assistance to 13 Midwest communities through grants made possible by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. NCA also:

- Completes studies related to golf barriers to persons with disabilities.
- Conducts longitudinal studies on accessible playground surfaces and trail surfaces.
- Convenes museum and site exhibit stakeholders, focusing on people with low vision and blindness.
- Continues to work with NPS in training and park unit accessibility assessments.

Also in this era, Eppley was able to diversify in:

- Visitor surveys at Assateague Island National Seashore on design of a new visitor center, best approaches to managing entry fees, and Oversand Vehicle (OSV) permit use.
- Assist Indiana Dunes National Park with civic engagement for in-park residents in the neighboring communities.
- Implement online training for the Arthur Carhart National Wilderness Training Center. This partnership offers 36 online courses for federal agency wilderness managers.

- Completed system park and recreation master plans for Anchorage, Indianapolis, Wabash, Washington, and other locations.

2010-2020

Significant changes to Eppley and NCA occurred throughout this decade including the merger into one organization to better meet the needs of park, recreation, and public land managers and agencies. During this time, many long-standing collaborations with the NPS were ended as the agency developed internal capacity. Other public land management organizations sought partnerships with Eppley during this time. Highlights include:

- Anticipating the 100th anniversary of the NPS in 2016, and 100th anniversary of Indiana State Parks, Eppley creates online courses describing the history of the NPS, and Indiana State Parks.
- Partnering with the Center for Park Management, Eppley leads a partnership of six universities to provide a hybrid, three-course online graduate certificate in Leadership for Public Lands and Culture Heritage.
- Bureau of Land Management (BLM) starts a ten-year collaboration with Eppley for a desk guide for BLM site coordinators, followed by 2018 project to develop 30 training modules and BLM units.
- Design, development and online delivery of training for American Battle Monuments Commission (ABMC) on the U.S. involvement World War I to assist ABMC staff.
- Development of guidelines for the fitness industry promoting access for people with disabilities at fitness facilities.
- Accessibility experts on the exhibit design of the NPS Gateway Arch visitor center, White House Visitor Center, and the First Peoples Museum.
- Collaboration with the NPS for the Targeted Accessibility Improvement Program (TAIP) identifying physical and programmatic accessibility challenges in parks.
- Created and host online training for recreation users at specific parks including:
 - Yellowstone National Park Snowmobile Education Course
 - Everglades Recreational Boater Course (in Spanish and English),
 - North Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary Recreational Boater Course
 - Montgomery County Parks Online Visitor Learning Management System

2020 to current

As this decade closed Eppley expands its work to include offering the Playground Maintenance Technician (PMT) training nationwide (licensed from the Park District Risk Management Association of Illinois) focusing on ensuring that playgrounds are safe and well maintained for children.

Eppley also expanded its work to include the US Army Corps of Engineers (with IU SPEA) to develop community-focused, science-based guidance that adapt to diverse kinds of communities in the Great Lakes.

As this era continues, Eppley’s is moved to the Indiana Institute on Disability and Community, a six-center outreach unit at IU that works with communities to welcome, value, and support the meaningful participation of people of all ages and abilities through research, education, and service. This merger enables Eppley to continue its work under the IU Vice President for Research and IIDC with new collaborations including:

- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service accessibility training and assessment for the John Heinz National Wildlife Refuge in Philadelphia, PA.
- Collaboration with U.S. Forest Service National Accessibility Program in a multi-year agreement to assess Forest Service outdoor recreation area access and the effectiveness of the access data system.



2023, Eppley continues its mission to advance knowledge and quality of experience for all people

1993-IU Creates NCA and Eppley