

iSWOOP: Interpreters and Scientists Working On-Site at Our Parks

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iSWOOP is a professional development program that helps park rangers bridge the gap between the public and the researchers at Acadia National Park, Boston Harbor Islands, Carlsbad Caverns, Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore, Jean LaFitte National Park, and Joshua Tree National Park.

iSWOOP is a way to bring scientists, educators, and interpreters together to foster a better understanding of science that's going on in national parks, to really enhance STEM learning for visitors.



—Dr. Louise Allen
Winston-Salem University

This project is meant to advance STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) learning among national park visitors. iSWOOP brings together educators, scientists, and National Park Service (NPS) interpreters to incorporate site-based science into programs for the public.

Project staff seek to build expertise within the interpreter and ranger community. Staff engage with the researchers on site, and host sessions to help the rangers interpret complex data, and then to ask informed questions of the researchers. When the rangers come to a deeper understanding of the research, their interactions with visitors are also transformed. Rangers learn from iSWOOP to guide visitors to answer their own or each others' questions in order to build scientific literacy.

iSWOOP supports the NPS in fulfilling its educational vision by enhancing interpreter-visitor interactions in four ways, providing interpreters with:

- Direct contact with scientists doing research in the park in an interactive format;
- Field-based experiences, increasing their awareness of scientific park-based research;
- Compelling visual data and graphs which can function as a jumping off point for STEM learning;
- Ongoing opportunities to reflect on and then improve their interactions with visitors, increasing their strategies for leveraging visitors' questions for active inquiry.

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