

Wilton's Weir Farm among National Parks up for 'reshaping'

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Hour Photo/Alex von Kleydorff The Weir Residence at Weir Farm National Historic Site is set for Grand Opening Weekend May 24, 25 after a multi year restoration to the studios and the home of American Impressionist Julian Alden Weir in Branchville Ct.

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WILTON – Van Alen Institute and the National Park Service have launched National Parks Now, a competition inviting multidisciplinary teams of young professionals to develop strategies for reshaping the national parks visitor experience.

As the National Park Service prepares to celebrate its centennial in 2016, the competition highlights four parks in the Northeast Region as case studies for attracting diverse audiences, telling new stories, and engaging the next generation of visitors at a time of fast-evolving technologies, regional contexts, and audience expectations:

- Sagamore Hill National Historic Site (Oyster Bay, N.Y.), the estate of President Theodore Roosevelt;
- Steamtown National Historic Site (Scranton, Pennsylvania), one of the world's most important monuments to the steam locomotive;
- Paterson Great Falls National Historical Park (Paterson, N.J.), a historic birthplace of American textile manufacturing;
- Weir Farm National Historic Site, the summer estate of the artist Julian Alden Weir.

These sites tell complex stories about one of the country's densest and most diverse urban regions and contain countless layers of the nation's economic, ecological, and cultural history.

National Parks Now calls on teams to propose a broad range of interventions – new learning tools, hands-on workshops, customizable self-led tours, site-specific leisure and exploration opportunities, digital narratives, short or long-term interactive installations, performance events, outreach and engagement campaigns, for example – to create new experiences that connect these parks to larger, more diverse audiences throughout the region, and develop a model for similar parks nationwide.

"As we look back at the 100-year legacy of the National Park Service, it's also a perfect time to look creatively at the visitor experience at several select park units and consider new ways to share park stories and respond to audience needs," said Gay Vietzke, deputy regional director, National Park Service, Northeast Region. "National Parks Now is a truly innovative – and necessary – effort to ensure national parks are relevant in the 21st century."

National Parks Now is a central part of Elsewhere: Escape and the Urban Landscape, a multi-year initiative of Van Alen Institute exploring how both the form and organization of the built environment influence our need for escape.

Through competitions, public programs, and research, this unique multidisciplinary effort is bringing together innovators in design, public health, policy, and the sciences to change the way we understand cities. Visit www.vanalen.org/nationalparksnow for a complete RFQ, including details on the submission process.

Multidisciplinary teams will be selected from an international open Request for Qualifications process. Teams are strongly encouraged to include expertise in fields such as architecture and landscape architecture, graphic and interactive design, exhibition and film production, history, preservation, communications, and the social and environmental sciences.

Team leaders must be early career professionals with professional degrees obtained within the last 10 years, and teams are encouraged to apply with an academic partner that could incorporate the challenges of the competition into studios, independent studies, or other education programs.

The deadline for registration and electronic submission of the RFQ is 11:59 p.m. EDT on Oct. 30, 2014 via the competition website.

Four teams – one for each park site – will be selected to receive a \$15,000 stipend each to participate in a six-month, collaborative research and design process that explores the themes of region, engagement, narrative, and place.

At the conclusion of this phase, one team will be selected to receive an additional \$10,000 to create a prototype for one of their strategies, which will be implemented at their site in the summer of 2015.

National Parks Now is the latest of Van Alen Institute's collaborations with NPS through Designing the Parks, an examination of the past, present, and future of park planning and design.

Through a two-part conference in 2008, Designing the Parks brought together professionals in history, landscape architecture, architecture, historic preservation, and related fields to explore a unified design vision and produce a preliminary set of design principles to shape national parks in the twenty-first century.

In 2011, Van Alen Institute and its partners launched Parks for the People, the first design competition for the Designing the Parks initiative, challenging student design teams to examine seven national park sites around the country and consider how they could be reimaged as models for sustainable and enduring public spaces.

Visit www.vanalen.org/nationalparksnow for a complete RFQ, including details on the submission process.

The project team for National Parks Now is led by Van Alen Institute's director of competitions Jerome Chou and competitions coordinator Stephen Klimek; and National Park Service's Northeast Region's deputy regional director Gay Vietzke; chief, resource planning and compliance Shaun Eyring; and chief, interpretation, education, and partnerships Barbara Pollarine.

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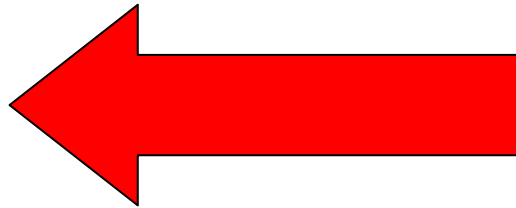
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About Van Alen Institute

At Van Alen Institute, we believe design can transform cities, landscapes, and regions to improve people's lives. We collaborate with communities, scholars, policymakers, and professionals on local and global initiatives that rigorously investigate the most pressing social, cultural, and ecological challenges of tomorrow.

Building on more than a century of experience, we develop cross-disciplinary research, provocative public programs, and inventive design competitions.

Our recent and ongoing competitions include Rebuild by Design, sponsored by President Obama's Hurricane Sandy Task Force and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, which resulted in nearly a billion dollars of funding to support innovative design and planning strategies to better protect cities and towns across the Northeast from future storms; and Future Ground, in partnership with the New Orleans Redevelopment Authority, which will develop design and policy strategies to reuse vacant land in New Orleans.

Van Alen is also working with Environmental Defense Fund and Happold Consulting to support Changing Course, a design competition led by Louisiana and national leaders to reimagine a more sustainable Lower Mississippi River Delta.