

MAB/ICC Meeting Attended by U.S. for Last Time

The proposed U.S. withdrawal from UNESCO at the end of calendar year 1984 raised the importance of the December 1984 Eighth Annual Meeting in Paris of the International Coordinating Council for the Man and the Biosphere Program so far as the United States was concerned. The meeting provided the last opportunity for the U.S. to participate formally as a member of the ICC.

According to William P. Gregg, Jr., a member of the U.S. delegation, Delegation Chairman Bill L. Long (Director, Office of Food and Natural Resources, U.S. Department of State) emphasized the United States' strong support for MAB and the intention of the U.S. to establish mechanisms for strengthening U.S. involvement in future MAB activities.

Key outcome of the meeting was a series of ICC decisions that will have the effect of minimizing the short-term impacts of U.S. withdrawal from UNESCO so far as U.S. effective participation in MAB is concerned. Most important of these decisions were:

1. Establishment of MAB Advisory Panels. The ICC established two advisory panels to assist the ICC in planning and implementing various aspects of the MAB program. One of the panels will deal with the overall MAB program and will help the ICC establish priorities and recommend strategies for developing existing projects and launching new initiatives, particularly in complex fields such as integrated modeling and forecasting.

The other panel will review biosphere reserve nominations and provide professional oversight of the

development of the international network and its functions. As both bodies are technical and advisory rather than governmental, U.S. authorities will be eligible to participate, thus providing a vehicle for continuing U.S. involvement in the development of MAB internationally.

Gregg was requested by the UNESCO Secretariat to recommend terms of reference for the biosphere reserve panel that will become operational this year. If properly structured, Gregg said, this panel can help improve the quality of available information on biosphere reserves, improve objectivity in biosphere reserve selection, provide needed guidance for developing biosphere reserve functions, and generate institutional support for biosphere reserves.

"Further," Gregg said, "the panel will offset the limitations of the MAB Bureau, which has reviewed biosphere reserve nominations in the past, but which, by its own admission, lacks the professional expertise to do so — much less to provide the oversight the project requires."

"From the NPS perspective," Gregg said, "I believe that the panel can help provide the additional guidance our biosphere reserve managers will need as the concept continues to evolve. That such guidance is needed was repeatedly underscored in the November 1984 Gatlinburg conference on management of such reserves."

2. New MAB Appointments. Dr. Gonzalo Halffter, deputy director of Mexico's National Council on Sci-

ence and Technology, and chairman of MAB Mexico, was elected chairman of the ICC. Dr. Halffter is the architect of Mexico's biosphere reserves, widely regarded as the most successful in the developing world. Canada was elected to the MAB Bureau, in effect replacing the United States. This was viewed by Gregg as a positive development, particularly now that the U.S. is no longer in UNESCO.

3. Adoption of Action Plan for Biosphere Reserves. The principal accomplishment of the First International Congress on Biosphere Reserves (Minsk, USSR, October 1983) was adoption of a set of objectives and recommendations to provide a general framework for implementing the BR project. This material was used by the UNESCO MAB Secretariat as a basis for an Action Plan for Biosphere Reserves, made available to ICC in draft form well in advance of the Paris meeting.

In an early session, member states raised a variety of concerns about the draft plan, as a result of which Gregg and five others were appointed to a working group (chaired by Gregg) to address those concerns. The result was a plan and a two-year program that were adopted by the members with what Gregg reports as "considerable enthusiasm." The approved plan Gregg called "consistent with the approach we are taking to implement the biosphere reserve project in the U.S., and should prove a useful blueprint for its future development."

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4. No Across-the-Board Cuts. A consensus emerged that MAB, as one of UNESCO's most successful programs, should be highly competitive in any future reallocation of funds within UNESCO. Future reduction in UNESCO funding for MAB was not assumed as a given for planning purposes. After considerable debate, it was decided that any cuts would be made in individual field activities, and that no across-the-board deletions of established MAB projects, such as island ecosystems or urban systems, will be made.

"This decision," Gregg observed, "helps assure that MAB will remain a global program with benefits to all participating nations, and that field activities will be prioritized on the basis of merit and consistency with the purpose of MAB.

5. MAB Bureau Review of Biosphere Reserve Nominations. Each year the MAB Bureau reviews biosphere reserve nominations submitted by MAB National Committees. This year, 24 biosphere reserves were nominated. Seventeen were approved and ten were deferred for consideration by the Advisory Panel on BRs later this year. The Bureau's action brings the total number of biosphere reserves to 243 in 65 countries.

In the U.S., the Bureau approved the Colorado and Mojave Deserts BR, containing Death Valley and Joshua Tree NMs among other sites. This brings the total number of U.S. BRs to 41. The Carolinian-South Atlantic BR was deferred by the Bureau because of comments by the UNESCO MAB Secretariat relating to lands administered by the State of Georgia, which declined to participate in the nomination. In addition, the nominations for Copper River Delta BR and the Glacier Bay-Admiralty Island BR in Alaska were withdrawn because the U.S. Forest Service had not yet formally endorsed them. In Mexico, the Pinacate BR (adjacent to Oregon Pipe Cactus NM in the U.S.) nomination was withdrawn for lack of necessary endorsements by the Mexican government.

6. Recommendations for Future Action. In a memorandum to the NPS Chief of International Affairs, Gregg made the following recommendations:

a) NPS should make the approved Action Plan for Biosphere Reserves available to Regional offices and to personnel responsible for planning and management in the 23 NPS units included within biosphere reserves. Particular attention should be given to full consideration of the objectives and recommendations of the Plan in development of Statements for Management, General Management Plans, Resource Management Plans, and other planning documents.

b) The Park Service should support establishment of the Advisory Panel on Biosphere Reserves and contribute in any way possible to its success.

c) NPS should continue its traditional support of the U.S. MAB Program, including funding for the U.S.-MAB Secretariat and selected projects involving biosphere reserves.