

The Summer 1985 issue of *Orion*, nature quarterly publication of the Myrin Institute, Inc. (136 E. 64th St., NYC 10021), carries two articles on Biosphere Reserves: one by William P. Gregg, Jr. and Betsy Ann McGean ("Biosphere Reserves: Their History and Their Promise") and one by J. Ronald Engel ("Biosphere Reserves as Sacred Space"). The following two excerpts are from these pieces, the first by Bill Gregg.

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"To understand the power of symbolism in the conservation of protected areas, we need only look at the time-honored success of the national park concept. Thoughts of national parks evoke visions of breathtaking vistas and unique natural features, pride in one's natural heritage, and protectiveness toward the masterworks of nature. For millions, the spiritual renewal and the opportunities for aesthetic experience and recreation found in these landscapes can be duplicated nowhere else. The symbolic value of the national park is clear, effective, and enduring – its power to inspire and motivate people far surpasses that of any other category of protected area.

"A biosphere reserve may in time prove to be an equally compelling symbol, although quite distinct from that of the national park. For increasing numbers, the biosphere reserve evokes the image of a large, self-sustaining, and well-protected ecosystem, harboring a vast archive of information essential to mankind's future well-being. This information is stored in ecological relationships and genetic codes and unlocked through scientific study, so that it may be applied practically through enlightened management. The image of the biosphere reserve includes the human element – people working together to build a model program that demonstrates the value of conservation within a particular natural region. On a broader scale, it is a center for cooperation among nations allied in the search for solutions to regional and global environmental problems, such as acid precipitation. The emotions elicited by the reserves are those of compassion for the condition of the human family and the world's ecosystems, and enthusiasm for human cooperation to improve that condition. Just as for national parks, these feelings involve intense protectiveness, but in the case of the biosphere reserves, the protectiveness extends beyond the resources themselves to what they represent – an inexhaustible library of information for advancing human welfare.

"The national park draws its life as a symbol primarily from the association with humanity's spiritual well-being. The biosphere reserve draws its vitality primarily from its association with our material progress. The widely promoted values of aesthetics and recreation have made it difficult for most national parks to realize their potential as scientific and educational resources. Biosphere reserves can be catalysts for developing this potential. When a national park becomes part of a biosphere reserve, two powerful symbols are joined. Such unions can open immense opportunities for particular geographic areas to serve humanity and at the same time broaden support for the conservation of protected areas."

Gregg, an NPS ecologist, is co-chairman of the U.S. MAB Project Directorate on Biosphere Reserves. McGean is a Yale graduate student.

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The Engel piece focuses on Parc National des Cévennes in southern France – officially declared a Biosphere Reserve on Dec. 8, 1984.

"Science in the Cévennes park is conceived as one of the human arts to be used on behalf of the total creative experience of the community life. The scientific program of research serves to enhance both human actualization and natural evolution. The great vulture was reintroduced with the help of science, the strains of mountain rye are being preserved with the help of science, the fertility of the mountain soil is being increased with the help of science, new and more adequate building materials are being introduced with the help of science. In each of these cases, science is a means to the coevolution of humanity and nature. And in each of these cases, the contribution of science to sustaining life is made possible by visible working relationships between scientists and local people. Knowledge is constantly being looped back into consequences people can see and understand and into projects in which they can participate and from which they can benefit. When the literature of the biosphere reserves speaks of the human ecosystem as the ultimate unit of scientific accountability, this, concretely, is what it is talking about.

"The cosmic order the biosphere reserve represents is not that of an objective eternal reality unaffected by human aspiration and choice, but the dynamic order of creative coevolutionary advance."

Engle is professor of social ethics at Meadville/Lombard Theological School, affiliated with the University of Chicago; author of Sacred Sands: The Struggle for Community in the Indiana Dunes, and an article in the latest George Wright Society FORUM (Vol. 4 No. 2), "Promoting the Development and Adoption of Environmental Ethics."