

The Paradox of Repeating Error From NP to BR and Beyond

By Robert D. Barbee and John D. Varley

Most of the renewable and nonrenewable resource problems that Yellowstone National Park faces today trace back to its creation over 100 years ago. When the park was set aside in 1872, protection of geologic wonders was paramount. Forests and wildlife, two of the most important aspects of the park today, were recognized by Congress in an almost off-hand way. The boundaries they set failed to encompass a complete ecological unit. Later boundary changes attempted to remedy this but it was too little, too late. When the park was designated a Biosphere Reserve a century later, it was again set aside for its geological borders, which repeated and reaffirmed the earlier congressional oversight.

While the first designation did not consider the ecological integrity of the area, the second failed to consider that the greater Yellowstone region is likely the largest, essentially intact wild ecosystem remaining in the temperate zone of the earth. As a result of

the development of the West, the greater Yellowstone area has become an ecological island, one which is managed by over two dozen separate political and administrative entities.

If the natural condition of this massive ecosystem is to survive in the future, an innovative new strategy for management must be devised. Supporters of the Biosphere Reserve concept seek to test and prove the concept of a model Biosphere Reserve as a practical management tool for the next generation. The designation of the greater Yellowstone ecosystem as a model International Biosphere Reserve may be the most efficient and politically acceptable way of preserving this area.

Editor's Note: The above is an abstract of the presentation made by Yellowstone NP Supt. Barbee and John D. Varley at the Man and the Biosphere conference for managers of Biosphere Reserves at the Great Smoky Mountains in November 1984.