

Great Smoky Mountains Establishes A Biosphere Reserve Plan

■ By Ro Wauer

Great Smoky Mountains National Park Superintendent John Cook took initial steps recently to establish a progressive action program for the Great Smoky Mountains Biosphere Reserve. Superintendent Cook handed out a three-page directive at the park's June 25 staff meeting and stated that it was time for this park to take significant actions to achieve goals established for Biosphere Reserves. He said, "I believe that

a well conceived Biosphere Reserve program has great potential for providing a better management system that can lead toward a better relationship with our neighbors for our mutual well-being."

The Great Smoky Mountains Biosphere Reserve program includes a wide variety of projects, most of which are multidisciplinary in nature. Many are long-term and require careful planning and development. A major emphasis of the program is better understanding and relations with park neighbors, and so the long-term goal of restoring the American Chestnut tree to the Southern Appalachian ecosystem will serve as the umbrella concept. The park will develop a comprehensive plan around that idea that will include the establishment of gene banks and the eventual cultivation, growing and planting of this largely extirpated species. All of the various related projects will provide greater visibility to the importance of protecting the natural watersheds and the interconnections between the native resources of the core area and the surrounding floral, faunal and human resources.

Some of the additional closely related science projects include (1) developing a compatible watershed research project with the U.S. Forest Service's Coweeta Hydrological Laboratory as a continuum of mutually beneficial studies; (2) establishing a project on roadside and powerline rights-of-way vegetation to stress the use of native plants, and creation of low maintenance plant communities, and reduction of herbicide use; (3) initiating a workshop on methods to establish permanent vegetation plots in a Biosphere Reserve and address data management protocols; (4) developing international agreements regarding cooperative data files on the conservation of biological diversity.

A research fellowship for special MAB projects to be undertaken at Great Smoky Mountains Biosphere Reserve will be established with non-federal organizations or industry.

The prototype Resources Information Tracking System (RITS) will also be finalized. RITS will be used in tracking all resource management and science activities underway and anticipated, related five-years of programming, principal investigators and specialists involved with each of the science and resource management projects, and the resultant publications and reports. RITS will be park-specific and available for use with IBM-PC with a hard disk and dBase-III. This project is in the final development stage at Clemson University, and has been supported by this park and three Regional offices, Southeast, Mid-Atlantic and Midwest.

The Great Smoky Mountains Biosphere Reserve program is designed to address early-on some essential requirements. In-park training for all park employees is scheduled for fall 1985; this project can also serve as a useful prototype for other Biosphere Reserves. In-park training is vitally important to assure full understanding and support *inside* the park. Expansion of the park's *outreach* program is also an important phase of the program and includes greater use of some of the tried and true interpretive methods on which the National Park Service built its reputation for communicating with the young and old outside of the parks. The park plans to develop a prototype outreach program, within the umbrella of the Biosphere

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Reserve concept, that the Service can utilize as a model. This park already has the key ingredients of experienced and dedicated interpreters; the Tremont Environmental Center in the park, which is operated by the Cooperative Association and maintains contacts with a wide variety of school systems and concerned educators; and the fact that the park is located in the heart of a section of the country with a high rural population, closely related to the land.

The park also will initiate a workshop with many of its neighbors to discuss various ideas relating to either expansion of the Biosphere Reserve boundary or the cluster concept for the Southern Appalachians. This and a number of other identified projects, including the development of a Biosphere Reserve Coordinating Committee, also are under consideration.

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