

mab notes

The big question for biosphere reserves has always been: How do we expand our outlook beyond our unit boundaries and establish regional cooperation to address regional resource issues? In other words, how do we truly become a biosphere reserve?

A good model exists in the Southern Appalachian MAB Cooperative, but development of similar MAB regional structures elsewhere has been slow. There is hope that such development can be speeded up soon. In spring 1992 the U.S. MAB National Committee established a **special committee to develop a national MAB program plan** for U.S. biosphere reserves. The committee is composed of policy officials, BR managers, and scientists. Gene Hester, Associate Director, Natural Resources, and Rob Arnberger, Superintendent of Big Bend NP, represent NPS on this committee, which will pay special attention to finding ways U.S. MAB can improve the benefits of biosphere reserves to managers.

In 1991 **Big Thicket National Preserve** took the innovative step of producing a separate Statement for Management regarding its biosphere reserve status. The SFM lists 13 objectives, including research and education related to regional issues and steps to set up formal structures for communication among local groups on regional resource issues. A state park, state forests, Indian reservation, university research area, and a Nature Conservancy sanctuary in the area are potential partners.

The park recently has drafted a Partnerships in Preservation Plan to conduct outreach on regional issues with local groups and private landowners. Big Thicket thus joins a number of other biosphere reserves that are attempting to function like a BR and could do much more if given adequate support.

At the Vail symposium, the working group on

Leading by Example identified the BR program as an area of developing NPS environmental leadership. Bill Gregg, NPS MAB Coordinator, was asked to give his thoughts on how the BR program could implement the Vail recommendations on leadership. Among his suggestions:

- A BR managers workshop to assess progress and recommend new steps;

- Increased incorporation of BR objectives in planning documents of BR parks;

- Guidelines for including BR responsibilities in position descriptions of those responsible for BR program coordination;

- Improved Servicewide recognition and interpretation of biosphere reserves;

- Increased financial and FTE support for regional BR programs and international BR linkages.

The MAB Directorate on Tropical Ecosystems has developed an interesting and ambitious core program on sustainable development and conservation in the **Maya tri-national region** of Belize, Guatemala, and Mexico. This area includes the Calakmul and Montes Azules BRs in Mexico and the Maya BR in Guatemala as well as agricultural and forestry lands. Much of the landscape remains relatively undisturbed, and a core program goal is to provide government decision-makers and resource managers with information that will help them guide development in a way that does not significantly impede normal ecosystem functioning or adversely affect species diversity and viability. The program takes a management-oriented approach to research: Managers and government officials will be asked what the problems are, and research will be designed to address these problems. Creating a communication network among all researchers in the region is another goal.

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