

Spring Editorial

The scientific approach to ecosystem management seems to be going through a stage of planet-wide synthesis. The news in this issue underscores the holistic approach everywhere being taken in pursuit of general principles and of the widest possible contextual sciencescape into which various pieces of these applied principles can be fitted.

Scientists and managers are seen in growing numbers, to be working together. Beyond their individual research and management goals there looms, for both, the overall objective of perpetuating the resources of Earth.

The real strides in conceptualizing the world's Biosphere Reserve network and in devising a strategy for worldwide action are all the more impressive in the face of U.S. withdrawal from UNESCO at last year's end, (page 23): The grand plan formulated by committees working at the highest levels of the Man and the Biosphere Program is exquisitely matched at the other end of the MAB hierarchical scale by the Bob Barbee quote (page 22): "I came here to this MAB conference to find out how to manage a biosphere reserve; what I'm finding instead is that the biosphere reserve concepts will help me manage my park."

There is a beautiful closing of an impressive circle here . . . the dawning understanding on the part of managers of individual parts of various reserves that what they do as park managers is contributing to the realization of the overall Biosphere Reserve concept and the preservation of livable human habitat.

The conservation genetics being practiced at various sites throughout the NPS system by Christine Schonewald-Cox and Co., (page 4) the Wildlife Habitat Relationship system being implemented at Pinnacles National Monument (page 16), the growing attention to other Systemwide problems and the development of answering management tools – all are evidence that a new age of understanding is a-borning. Television programs such as *Nova* and the various network science specials are keeping up the drumbeat of information, alerting the public to the world-scale of most of our problems.

Perhaps the most compelling part of this awakening process is the fact that it is not just "natural resources" we are dealing with, but the life-support systems of the biosphere. Natural resources is a term referring to something that, more accurately, is a cultural matter. It is human beings – out of their peculiar, uniquely social wisdom – who "decide" what is a natural resource and what is not. It is, it was, and it probably always will be a matter of human opinion as to just what constitutes a natural resource and what is merely a natural fact of life or a natural nuisance.

The life-support systems are another matter entirely. The "synthesis" referred to here is mainly concerned with the general principles of how systems work – how they can be manipulated in order to favor the survival of threatened gene pools of plant and animal materials – how they can be made to produce more or less of substances and materials we need or cannot stand. The Biosphere Reserves are especially important in the latter regard, dealing as they do with so-called "natural" ecosystems paired with manipulated areas of the same basic make-up.

Park Science only reports what is going on. But sometimes it's pleasant to look over the copy for an issue and realize that, small as we are, we are actively engaged in a very large and important movement – the movement from ignorance to wisdom, from drift to directed progress.