

From the Editor

Three well-planned days of intensive focus on the world biosphere reserve concept – June 22-24 at Kalispell, Montana – resulted in unanimous expressions of support from the 120 participants in "Toward the Biosphere Reserve: Exploring Relationships Between Parks and Adjacent Lands."

This conference, unlike so many others, was not a one-legged stool with science as its only subject and support. Conceived by NPS Biologist Cliff Martinka and co-hosted by Glacier NP Superintendents Bob Haraden and Bernie Loeff, Waterton Lakes NP superintendent across the Canadian border, the conference was a rich, lively mix of park personnel (research and management), engineers, cattle ranchers, county commissioners, regional citizen activists, and other management agency personnel spanning local through federal and international levels.

Waterton and Glacier parks are world biosphere reserves, representing together a spectacular example of a mountain biome, their world designation coming from UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere (MAB) program. The meeting followed immediately on the heels of a gala 50th anniversary celebration of the two parks' establishment as an International Peace Park. NPS Director Russell Dickenson spoke at that ceremony on June 18.

For any who doubt the need for a network of world biosphere reserves, the three day conference in Kalispell was rich food for thought. Instead of presenting research results that could just as well have grown out of park or other research programs, conferees spent their time documenting the need for coordinated collection of information worldwide, for disseminating that information in ways that demand public attention and action, and in exploring ways to build into biosphere reserve programs the participation of surrounding areas.

Conferees concluded that the 10-year period since the idea was born had been a necessary "hatching" time. In the interim, global environmental problems have arisen to underscore the need for, and usefulness of, the "paired area" concept – the unique pairing in each reserve of a largely natural core area with an experimental area where manipulation is carried out. The fact that no overall biosphere reserve program of structured research and funding has yet emerged was viewed at Kalispell as a plus.

The rationale was that formulation of a structured program has been deferred until precisely the time when an open regional approach to such programming is becoming recognized as a way to handle a whole nest of newly-emerging needs.

"The beauty of the biosphere reserve idea," said Haraden, "is its lack of rigidity. It has attracted the participation of world science and government and at the same time has remained free to grow and adapt to the changing needs of the world. That's what we're doing here at this conference – inviting regional interests to come in and be part of the design."

They came, and they took part. Representatives of the ranching community, for instance, endorsed the goal of coordinated research worldwide, and added to the paired-area concept the idea of studying existing uses of adjoining lands. Cooperating private landholders and other public land managers would be parties to the research and would engage in the search for compatible uses. At the same time, the ranchers presented problems from the ranchers' point of view, and expressed willingness to explore with the biosphere reserve people ways in which their interests could be served within a framework of genetic preservation and ecosystem integrity.

The chairman of the Flathead River Basin Environmental Impact Study steering committee summed up the need to involve all local interests in the ongoing studies "so that the research results are internalized within the region," and the necessity of acquainting the regions around biosphere reserves with the direct tie-in between a healthy ecosystem and their own water taps, dinner tables, bank accounts, schools, clubs and churches.

Bill Gregg, NPS coordinator for MAB, called the biosphere reserve concept "a whole new dimension in world conservation," and Robert Scace of Reid, Crowther & Partners, Ltd., a Canadian firm of consulting engineers and planners, sounded the closing note – a recognition that biosphere reserve studies include man as the most important change agent in the environment:

"Let us not leave here," he said, "without recognizing that in biosphere reserves we witness the coming together of the biophysical and the human ecological ends of the biosphere spectrum."