



United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20240

IN REPLY REFER TO:

N16(498)

JAN 10 1985

To: Chief, International Affairs

From: Ecologist, Special Science Projects Division

Subject: Foreign Travel Report

Purpose of Travel

To attend the Eighth Annual Meeting of the International Coordinating Council for the Man and the Biosphere Program as a member of the United States delegation. The meeting was held at UNESCO headquarters in Paris from 3-8 December 1984.

The United States Delegation

The United States provided the largest national delegation, which consisted of individuals responsible for administering the US-MAB Program. The professional diversity and experience of the delegation enabled the U.S. to intervene substantively and persuasively in the discussions. In addition to myself, representing MAB's biosphere reserves project, the delegation included:

Bill L. Long, Director, Office of Food and Natural Resources;
Department of State. Chairman of delegation.

Paul T. Baker, Pennsylvania State University, Chairman of
U.S. National Committee for MAB

Roger L. Soles, Executive Director, US-MAB Secretariat, Department
of State

Charles Slaughter, USDA Forest Service, Chairman of US-MAB's
Project Directorate on High Latitude Mountains and Tundra

Otto Solbrig, Harvard University, Member of US-MAB Executive
Committee (tropical ecosystems)

Evaluation

The proposed United States withdrawal from UNESCO at the end of calendar year 1984 raised the importance of this meeting because it provided an important and timely opportunity for the U.S. to influence the future structure and priorities of the MAB Program. Now that withdrawal from UNESCO has occurred, it will be the last opportunity, perhaps for some time, for the United States to participate formally as a member of the ICC. The Chairman of our delegation nevertheless emphasized the United States' strong support for MAB and our intention to establish mechanisms for strengthening our involvement in MAB activities in the future.

BIG THICKET NATIONAL PRESERVE

The key outcome of the meeting was a series of ICC decisions which will have the effect of minimizing the short-term impacts of the US withdrawal from UNESCO on our continued effective participation in MAB. The most important of these decisions were:

(1) Establishment of MAB Advisory Panels. The ICC established two advisory panels to assist the ICC in planning and implementing various aspects of the MAB Program. One of the panels will deal with the overall MAB Program, and will help the ICC establish priorities and recommend strategies for developing existing projects and launching new initiatives, particularly in complex fields such as integrated modelling and forecasting. The other panel will deal with biosphere reserves. This panel will review biosphere reserve nominations and provide professional oversight of the development of the international network and its functions. As both bodies are technical and advisory rather than governmental, authorities from the United States will be eligible to participate. It is my understanding from discussions with the Executive Director of the UNESCO MAB Secretariat (B.vonDroste) that representatives from the U.S. will be invited to participate on these panels, thus providing a vehicle for our continuing involvement in the development of MAB internationally.

I have been requested by the UNESCO Secretariat to recommend terms of reference for the biosphere reserve panel, which will become operational this year. The panel, if properly structured, can help improve the quality of available information on biosphere reserves, improve objectivity in biosphere reserve selection, provide needed guidance for developing biosphere reserve functions, and generate institutional support for biosphere reserves. Further, the panel will offset the limitations of the MAB Bureau, which has reviewed biosphere reserve nominations in the past, but which, by its own admission, lacks the professional expertise to do so, much less provide the oversight the project requires. From the NPS perspective, I believe that the panel can help provide the additional guidance which our biosphere reserve managers will need as the biosphere reserve concept continues to evolve. That such guidance is needed was repeatedly underscored in the recent (November 1984) Gatlinburg conference on the management of biosphere reserves.

(2) New MAB Appointments. Dr. Gonzalo Halffter, deputy director of Mexico's National Council on Science and Technology and Chairman of MAB Mexico, was elected chairman of the ICC. Dr. Halffter is the architect of Mexico's biosphere reserves, widely regarded as among the most successful in the developing world. Canada was elected to the MAB Bureau, in effect replacing the United States. We have a long history of collaboration with Canadian and Mexican MAB organizations, and the expanded role of our neighbors is a positive development, particularly now that the U.S. is no longer in UNESCO.

(3) Adoption of Action Plan for Biosphere Reserves. The principal accomplishment of the First International Congress on Biosphere Reserves (Minsk, USSR, October 1983) was the adoption of a set of objectives and recommendations to provide a general framework for implementing the biosphere reserve project. This material was used by the UNESCO MAB Secretariat as the basis for an Action Plan for Biosphere Reserves, which was made available to ICC members in draft form well in advance of the meeting. In an early session of the ICC meeting, member states raised various concerns about the draft plan. Among these were lack of clarity in what a biosphere reserve is and what it does, redundancy in recommendations, the inclusion of recommendations with potentially significant adverse impacts on domestic programs (the U.S. cited two of these), failure to place the biosphere reserves in proper perspective within the overall MAB Program, and--most importantly--lack of any indication of realistic priorities in view of the probable availability of funds and personnel.

I was privileged to be appointed to chair a working group to revise the plan to address the concerns raised by member states. The group consisted of Jeff McNeeley (IUCN), Gil Childs (FAO), Vladimir Sokolov (USSR-MAB), and Jane Robertson and Richard Bill (UNESCO MAB Secretariat). For three days we worked on improving the plan both editorially and substantively, and on preparing a two-year program of activities to receive priority consideration for support by UNESCO and the international organizations participating in MAB. The plan and two-year program (copies enclosed) were adopted by the members with considerable enthusiasm. The approved plan is consistent with the approach we are taking to implement the biosphere reserve project in the U.S., and should prove a useful blueprint for its future development.

(4) No Across-the-board Cuts. There was much discussion of ways to respond to possible future reductions in funds for MAB due to reductions in the overall UNESCO budget. A consensus was reached that MAB, as one of UNESCO's most successful programs, should be highly competitive in any future reallocation of funds within UNESCO. Future reduction in UNESCO funding for MAB, while recognized as a possibility, was not assumed as a given for planning purposes. After considerable debate, it was decided that any cuts would be made in individual field activities, and that no across-the-board deletions of established MAB projects, such as island ecosystems or urban systems, will be made. This decision helps assure that MAB will remain a global program, with benefits to all participating nations, and that field activities will be prioritized on the basis of merit and consistency with the purpose of MAB.

MAB Bureau Review of Biosphere Reserve Nominations

Each year, the MAB Bureau (consisting of the executive officers of the ICC) reviews biosphere reserve nominations submitted by MAB National Committees, and approves areas for designation. This year, 24 biosphere reserves were nominated. Seventeen were approved, and ten were deferred for consideration by the Advisory Panel on Biosphere Reserves later this year. The Bureau's action brings the total number of biosphere reserves to 243 in 65 countries.

In the United States, the Bureau approved the Colorado and Mojave Deserts Biosphere Reserve, containing Death Valley and Joshua Tree National Monuments, among other sites. This brings the total number of U.S. biosphere reserves to 41.

The Carolinian-South Atlantic Biosphere Reserve was deferred by the Bureau because of comments by the UNESCO MAB Secretariat relating to lands administered by the State of Georgia, which declined to participate in the nomination. The Bureau decided that any nomination having technical comments would be transmitted for consideration by the Advisory Panel later this year.

Upon my arrival in Paris, I withdrew our nominations for the Copper River Delta Biosphere Reserve and the Glacier Bay-Admiralty Island Biosphere Reserve in Alaska because the Forest Service had not yet formally endorsed them. These nominations were not presented to the Bureau. They will be completed and considered by the Panel when the needed endorsements have been received.

In Mexico, the nomination for the Pinacate Biosphere Reserve adjacent to Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument was withdrawn because it lacked all necessary endorsements from the Mexican Government. It will be considered by the Advisory Panel after the endorsements have been secured.

Recommendations for Future Action

The National Park Service should

(1) Make the approved Action Plan for Biosphere Reserves available to regional offices, and personnel responsible for planning and management in the 23 NPS units included within biosphere reserves. Particular attention should be given to full consideration of the objectives and recommendations of the Plan in the development of Statements for Management, General Management Plans, Resource Management Plans, and other planning documents, as appropriate.

(2) Support the establishment of the Advisory Panel on Biosphere Reserves, and contribute in any way possible to ensure its success.

(3) Continue our traditional support of the U.S. MAB Program, including funding for the US-MAB Secretariat and selected projects involving **biosphere** reserves.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'W. P. Gregg, Jr.', with a large, stylized flourish extending to the right.

William P. Gregg, Jr.

Enclosures

Action Plan for Biosphere Reserves

Biosphere Reserve Program, 1985-1986

List of Biosphere Reserves Approved by the MAB Bureau