

The U.S. Biosphere Reserves Association

The United States Biosphere Reserves Association (USBRA) is a non-profit organization incorporated in 2003 to provide leadership and support for a United States biosphere reserves program, and to convey factual information about the purposes and activities of biosphere reserves.

Supporting the Biosphere Reserves Program

Biosphere reserves are special places dedicated to exploring and demonstrating approaches to conservation and sustainable development. Worldwide, there are 425 biosphere reserves, including 47 reserves in the United States, designated as such by UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere Program. Ninety-five countries now participate in the program, but the U.S.'s biosphere reserve program has been inactive for more than 10 years. Now that the U. S. government has rejoined UNESCO with a commitment to participate fully in UNESCO's mission to advance human rights, tolerance, and learning, there is an opportunity and obligation for the United States to renew its biosphere reserve program and participate in achieving the biosphere reserve goals, which are to:

1. Develop and use biosphere reserves as models for conservation of natural and cultural diversity.
2. Develop and use the reserves as models of land management and sustainable development.
3. Develop the capacity to support conservation and sustainable development through partnerships for research, monitoring, information, education and training.

Goals

The aims of the Association are to:

- Convey factual information about biosphere reserves.
- Assist the USMAB Committee in planning and developing a national biosphere reserve program.
- Affiliate with groups locally and nationally to promote the biosphere reserve concepts and goals.
- Assist individual biosphere reserves in developing cooperative plans to achieve their goals, focusing on community-based, public-private partnership activities.
- Plan and develop collaborative activities with Mexico and Canada in a North American Biosphere Reserve Network, in collaboration with UNESCO and the international network of biosphere reserves.
- Perform periodic surveys and assessments of U. S. biosphere reserves to determine how they are carrying out their functions.
- Assist in developing and implementing projects for conservation and sustainable resource uses in biosphere reserves suitable to local and national needs.

Activities to Date

Association activities have included:

- Met and had discussions with key USDA, Forest Service, and National Park Service staff that resulted in renewed commitment and strategic planning for the renewal of the U.S. Biosphere Reserve Program.
- Participation in the Fifth Conference of Science and the Management of Protected Areas Association (SAMPAA), held in Victoria, BC, Canada, May 2003. A resolution was unanimously passed by about 450 participants at the Conference acknowledging the value of the Biosphere Reserve program as a practical means to achieve collaborative conservation of biodiversity, through integrated ecosystem-based management with the participation of local communities and indigenous cultures. Participants resolved to support efforts for the timely establishment of an effective and functional North American network of biosphere reserves.
- Conducted a United States Biosphere Reserves Survey to seek the input of biosphere reserve managers regarding the status of their biosphere reserves, the reserves' capacity for participating in a renewed U.S. program, and their interests in developing collaborative activities with Canadian and Mexican biosphere reserve programs. A report, *United States Biosphere Reserves Survey, 2003*, summarizing the survey results, was prepared in October 2003. Most respondents perceive there are management benefits of Biosphere Reserve status, and most say that support for the program can be increased. Ninety percent of the respondents are interested in planning a renewed program.

Activities Planned

The Association is planning two activities critical to the renewal of the Biosphere Reserves Program:

- An expert panel meeting of biosphere reserve managers and key advisors to the biosphere reserve program about revitalizing the program will be held February 24-25, 2004. The Association is planning the meeting in cooperation with the Forest Service and National Park Service, and it will be hosted by the Missouri Botanical Garden.
- The Association and the Southern Appalachian Man and the Biosphere Program (SAMAB) will host a meeting with Mexican and Canadian biosphere reserve representatives, April 27-30, 2004, to plan collaborative activities in a North American network of biosphere reserves. This meeting will identify projects that are doable, and establish communication among North American biosphere reserves regarding issues, successes and failures, and model *best practices* activities.

USBRA Information

The Association is a member-driven, non-profit organization supported largely by volunteers. Your support is crucial in helping the Association to achieve its goals.

Copies of the Association's by-laws and 501(c)3 documentation are available at samab.org/usbra; or by writing the Association at 314 Conference Center Building, Knoxville, TN, 37996-4138; or calling 865-974-4583.