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## Renewal of the U.S. Man and the Biosphere Program

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The steering group for the U.S. Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Program met on March 16, 2005, in conjunction with the George Wright Society's biennial meeting in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The purposes of the meeting were to review progress to date and plan next steps in transforming U.S. MAB into a fully functioning program. Several factors contributed to the success of the meeting. Among them were representation from many of the agencies that have participated in U.S. MAB, some continuity among participants at this meeting and those who had attended a May 2004 visioning meeting, the leadership of the new interim chairperson of the U.S. National Committee for MAB, and the participation of special guests from the UNESCO [U.N. Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization] MAB office and the Canadian Biosphere Reserves Association.

The meeting was an opportunity to brief all members of the steering group on activities conducted since the May 2004 U.S. MAB visioning meeting. Following recommendations from the visioning meeting, a focus of U.S. MAB activity has been the development of communication tools: a website and a brochure. The draft website developed by Dan Neary, U.S. Department of Agriculture–Forest Service, was presented for review and will be made public after reviewers' suggestions are incorporated. Developing the brochure is "on hold" until the U.S. National Committee meets. Revitalizing the U.S. National Committee also was a key directive stemming from the 2004 visioning workshop, and the U.S. MAB coordinator, Deb Hayes, U.S. Department of Agriculture–Forest Service, has been communicating with current members about a meeting date and agenda. Consultations have occurred with the U.S. National Commission for UNESCO about reestablishing the committee and procedural requirements should the committee elect to include nongovernmental members.

Pete Roussopoulos (U.S. Department of Agriculture–Forest Service), the new interim director for U.S. MAB, endorsed the ongoing review of the biosphere reserves and the drafting of criteria for U.S. biosphere reserves as positive steps in moving U.S. MAB forward. He identified the reestablishment of an active national committee and a communications strategy as essential next steps on the path.

Natarajan Ishwaran, director of the Division of Ecology and Earth Sciences and the secretary for MAB at UNESCO, offered encouragement to the U.S. in defining its connection to the MAB program. Presentations outlined UNESCO organization and priorities made clear the relationship of MAB to UNESCO focal areas. The information is beneficial in planning and seeking funding for U.S. proposals.

Other opportunities to strengthen the program discussed by participants include tapping an urban constituency interested in MAB and developing partnerships with related nongovernmental organizations and large-scale research activities such as the National Science Foundation's National Ecological Observatory Network and Long-term Ecological Research Network. The recent agreement between the U.S. National Aeronautics and Space

Administration and UNESCO may also benefit the U.S. MAB program. The consistency of objectives of the MAB program—especially biosphere reserve programs that emphasize community direction—and the U.S. administration’s focus on cooperative conservation (Executive Order No. 13352) helps affirm the direction of the U.S. MAB program. Better tailoring the biosphere reserve program to U.S. conditions is the objective of developing U.S.-specific biosphere reserve criteria, and V.C. (Tom) Gilbert of the U.S. Biosphere Reserves Association discussed this effort. And lastly, Glen Jamieson of the Canadian Biosphere Reserves Association discussed its efforts to foster communication across biosphere reserves and in communities hosting biosphere reserves. The Canadian Biosphere Reserves Association, the U.S. Biosphere Reserves Association, and Mexican counterparts have been discussing the benefits of North American cooperation and will continue discussions at subsequent meetings.