

*Working toward a prosperous and environmentally secure future*



*Hikers at Rocky Mountain Biosphere Reserve, Colorado. NPS photo.*

**What are biosphere reserves?** Biospheres are special places where people work together to improve human livelihoods and conserve their natural and cultural heritage. Biospheres use innovative approaches to conserve ecosystems and biodiversity and promote sustainable economic development at the landscape scale.



*Field trip at Everglades and Dry Tortugas Biosphere Reserve. NPS photo*

**Why are biosphere reserves important?** A secure future depends on healthy lands and waters and maintaining the services they provide to society. Our livelihoods and quality of life are linked to benefits provided by natural systems, such as crop pollination, water supply, natural flood control, recreation and tourism, and carbon sequestration. Our health and spiritual welfare, as well as our cultural heritage also depend on conserving cultural resources and historic values.

**Where are they located?** Twenty-eight biospheres across the continental United States, Alaska, Puerto Rico and Hawaii encompass a wide variety of lands and waters, from deserts to mountains and rivers to oceans, and agricultural lands to urban areas. Public and private entities, including private landowners and state, tribal, local, and federal managers, work together on shared goals and priorities. Their sizes vary, but most biospheres cooperate across jurisdictional lines to achieve results cooperation at larger landscape and seascape scales. Together these special places provide tremendous biological and economic values to local communities and the nation.

**How are they established?** A total of 701 biospheres in 124 nations worldwide are internationally recognized by the Man and the Biosphere Program (MAB). Biospheres always stay under the sovereign jurisdiction of their home country. National governments nominate the areas, but local people and organizations create and run them.

**What are their main goals?** Ecosystem health is a local, regional and global concern. They aim to give people and communities the means to thrive in harmony with their environment, and strive to be sites of excellence for collaborative conservation and development on a landscape scale. By combining the natural and social sciences, socioeconomics and education, they work to conserve natural and cultural resources, improve human livelihoods and promote economic development in sustainable ways.



Research intern at Congaree Biosphere Region, South Carolina. NPS photo.



Lava flow at Hawaiian Islands Biosphere Reserve. NPS photo.

**What are the benefits of participation?** MAB-recognized biosphere reserves enjoy national and international recognition that often increases community pride and sustainable tourism. Local cooperation and partnerships can galvanize economic development and conservation efforts. The cultural values and practices of local peoples are recognized fully and respected. Through participation in the U.S. and World Networks of Biosphere Reserves, members gain from lessons learned and best practices developed at other sites.

**How are they structured?** The biosphere reserve concept uses community involvement and open dialogue. Partners include federal, state, and local agencies, tribes, businesses, industry, agriculture, economic development entities, nongovernmental organizations, universities, civic organizations, and more, depending on their unique goals and landscapes. A lead organization provides logistical support and a local advisory group enables stakeholders to work for consensus.

**What role do humans have in biosphere reserves?** People are fundamental to biospheres. Whether they live close to the land, work locally in the modern economy, or directly manage the area, humans earn their livelihoods in ways that sustain local resources and values. People in biospheres work toward a shared vision of a prosperous and environmentally secure future.