



**Organization of Biological  
Field Stations**

*Supporting environmental research, education, and  
public understanding*

October 30, 2013

Biosphere Reserve Administrator:

As scientific organizations, we write to request that you work with the United States (U.S.) Department of State in the submission of the necessary survey credentials to continue participation of the U.S. in the World Network of Biosphere Reserves through the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) Man and the Biosphere Program. The World Network, currently including 621 biosphere reserves in 117 countries, provides increasingly significant opportunities for addressing conservation and sustainability challenges, such as climate change, through policy relevant site-based research, education and demonstration. U.S. participation is essential to realize the Network's full potential.

Through the U.S. MAB Program (USMAB), the U.S. has established the world's largest number of biosphere reserves, with a total of 47 containing 100 designated administrative areas. USMAB is an interagency and inter-organizational collaborative effort with the stated mission to "explore, demonstrate, promote, and encourage harmonious relationships between people and their environments, building on the MAB network of Biosphere Reserves and interdisciplinary research." Since 1974, USMAB's biosphere reserves have contributed to documenting and assessing changes in ecosystems and biodiversity, and the impacts of these changes on human welfare. Unfortunately, the U.S. has not fulfilled the UNESCO periodic review requirement for its biosphere reserves since the last new U.S. biosphere reserve designation in 1991. Given that UNESCO requires these periodic reviews every ten years, existing US biosphere reserves are currently at least one or two cycles behind schedule.

Biosphere reserves provide a cooperative framework for facilitating and sustaining a multitude of activities in ecological research, conservation, and education that, when integrated, further our understanding of natural reserves and the landscapes containing them while maintaining vital ecosystem services for economic and recreational use by human communities. Such services benefit federal, state and local natural resource educators and managers, private landowners, and the scientific community. Internationally, the World Network helps promote exchange of scientific research and collaboration about sustainable development practices in ways that address shared environmental goals and facilitate collaborative adaptation to climatic and other environmental changes at local to landscape scales.

The biosphere reserve periodic reviews serve an important purpose of identifying ecosystem and landscape changes and the reserves' overall contributions to biodiversity conservation; opportunities for research into and utilization of ecosystem services; and socioeconomic trends relating to sustainable development, including recreation and tourism. To avoid initiation of steps by UNESCO to delist U.S. biosphere reserves from the World Network, the Department of State must submit reviews for U.S. biosphere reserves to UNESCO by December 31, 2013. Maintaining the U.S. biosphere reserves in good standing with the international community is critical to the advancement of scientific collaborations that benefit the American people both locally and in their relationships with other countries. We urge you, as an administrator of one or more biosphere reserve sites, to support the timely coordination and completion of the required periodic review, and the future strengthening of U.S. participation in UNESCO's World Network of Biosphere Reserves.

Sincerely,

The Ecological Society of America  
George Wright Society  
Organization of Biological Field Stations