

# U. S. Biosphere Reserve Survey Results: 2003 and 1995

U.S. Biosphere Reserves Association

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The 2003 survey, conducted July 22–September 22, was carried out to assess the opinions of biosphere reserve representatives about their biosphere reserves, and their interest in renewing the program. There are 47 U.S. biosphere reserves, 10 of which have multiple units, so there are about 92 biosphere reserve sites or units. The managers' responses, along with those from a similar survey in 1995, are now being used to guide early planning for revitalizing the biosphere reserve program.

In introducing the 2003 survey the reserve representatives were reminded of the functions of biosphere reserves: conservation, sustainable development, and capacity building to support conservation and sustainable development. A summary of information from the 2003 and the 1995 surveys, and of the conclusions follows:

**A. Responses of the biosphere reserve representatives:**

- **2003-** 96% (45 of 47) reserves responded. 78% of the units (72 of 92) responded.
- **1995-** 67% (29 of 47) reserves responded. 46% of the units responded.

**B. Do the reserves have programs: 1) that identify explicitly with biosphere reserve goals? 2) that are consistent with biosphere reserve goals?**

- **2003:** Explicit: 46%; Consistent: 86%
- **1995:** Explicit: 49%; Consistent: 48%

**C. Management benefits of biosphere reserves:** (Respondents rated 15 types of benefits derived from biosphere reserve status)

**2003:** Using a five point scale, respondents reported that the most significant benefits are the improvement in public recognition of resource significance, encouraging research, and increases in environmental awareness. Of 15 categories of benefits listed, respondents reported totals of highly significant benefits- 60; significant- 134; obvious- 258; possible minor- 193; no benefit- 162.

**1995:** The average significance of management benefit categories was higher. (This could be attributed to more active biosphere reserve programs during that period.)

Respondents listed the four most significant benefits as facilitating ecosystem management, promoting environmental awareness, encouraging research, and facilitating international cooperation.

**D. Identification with Biosphere Reserve goals**

**2003:** The survey respondents were asked who, among the parties that interact with biosphere reserves, understands and identifies with the goals. Respondents report that they, themselves, do understand and identify with biosphere reserve goals. There is less understanding from their staff and partner agencies, and little understanding of the goals by local people.

**1995:** Results are similar to those in 2003.



**E. Who participates?**

**2003:** There were 18 categories of participants in both the 2003 and 1995 surveys. Universities and other research organizations, federal, state and regional agencies, local staff, and conservation groups are substantially involved. Local governments are involved substantially in 36% of the units. Among organizations not substantially involved are religious and service organizations, foreign governments and international agencies, and other biosphere reserves. The latter indicates that there is little collaboration and information exchange among biosphere reserves.

**1995:** Results are similar to those in 2003.

**F. Who's concerned or opposed?**

**2003:** The extent of concern or opposition cannot be determined because the respondents were not asked to report the number of expressions of concern within a specified period of time. Based upon the phrasing of the question, even an isolated expression of concern at any point in the reserve's history would have caused units to fall into the category of those that received expression of concern. Concerns were reported mostly from federal agencies (24%), local governments (17%), private organizations (14%) and visitors (14%). However, only 4 units (7%) reported some organized opposition. About 90% of the respondents report that support could be increased for a renewed biosphere reserve program.

**1995:** Concerns were reported more often from local residents (24%) and private organizations (21%), and less often from resource users (14%) and state and local governments (10%), and least often from federal agencies (7%) and visitors (7%).

**G. What's needed?**

**2003:** Respondents rated nine categories of potential needs. Top needs are additional funds and staff support. The next relate to publication education and support, information exchange among biosphere reserves, and policy and guidance from home/host agencies/organizations. Biosphere reserves with multiple units have special needs in that they require communication and coordination among their units to function effectively. Respondents in both 2003 and 1995 offered additional suggestions important to enhancing the biosphere reserve programs in their specific areas.

**1995:** Responses were very similar to those in the 2003 survey, except managers viewed as less important the policy and guidance from home agencies.

**H. Interest in future participation**

In the 2003 survey 91% of respondents (51) indicated their area would participate in planning a renewed biosphere reserve program; 79% said they would be interested in planning collaborative activities with Canadian and Mexican Biosphere Reserves.

**I. Conclusions**

Both surveys indicate that managers see important benefits in the biosphere reserve designation and concept. This is particularly notable in 2003 since the program has been inactive for almost a decade. The respondents to both surveys identified what is needed to develop successful programs- additional resources, enthusiastic local constituencies through education and participation, better communication among BRs, and policy and guidance from host agencies. Most (90%) of the respondents to the 2003 survey would participate in planning a new program.

Most of the respondents (79%) would help in planning collaboration activities with Canada and Mexico, and specific areas of interest were suggested for 40 BR units.