

Promoting Environmental Health and Stewardship of Natural and Cultural Resources in the Southern Appalachian Mountains, USA

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Prepared for Man and the Biosphere Programme “Seville+5” International Experts Meeting,
Working Group 5, Biosphere Reserve Manager or Coordinator?
Pamplona, Spain, October 24, 2000

The Southern Appalachian Man and the Biosphere (SAMAB) mission is “*to promote environmental health and stewardship of natural and cultural resources in the Southern Appalachians. It encourages community-based solutions to critical regional issues through cooperation among partners, information gathering and sharing, integrated assessments, and demonstration projects.*” SAMAB consists of a regional cooperative of 11 Federal agencies and the natural resource departments of 3 states; a not-for-profit foundation with corporate, educational, non-governmental-organization, and individual membership; and 6 public and private biosphere reserve units.

The biosphere reserve units independently *manage* their resources and affairs according to their own agency mandates or corporate charters and bylaws. The public-private SAMAB partnership of cooperative and foundation works to *coordinate* gathering and understanding of information about the six-state region (including the biosphere reserve units and the surrounding zone of cooperation), education and communication using that understanding, and demonstration of the application of that understanding. This presentation features several examples of these coordination activities.

The Southern Appalachian Assessment, completed in 1996 as a joint project of the Federal and state member agencies, was published as a five-volume report and a five-CD-Rom data set. Both the report and supporting data were made available on the SAMAB Web site (<http://samab.org>) for downloading by anybody interested. The assessment reports status and trends through time of atmospheric, aquatic, terrestrial, and socio-economic and cultural resources of the region, making extensive use of mapped information. Assessment results show clearly that resources in the biosphere reserves and other natural areas in the region can be influenced greatly by management practices and development in both the reserves and the surrounding zone of cooperation. The assessment has been cited as a model for regional assessment and has won several awards.

SAMAB has worked with a number of communities in the region to better understand conditions and trends in their environment. A 1997 “Community Sustainability Indicators Workshop” helped them use Assessment data to envision and evaluate alternative futures, and has led to additional work with several of the communities that are gateway communities adjacent to biosphere reserves or other natural areas.

SAMAB is now in the process of planning and co-leading an assessment of the environments surrounding the 2167 mi (3467 km) Appalachian Trail that extends from Maine to Georgia. This project will engage managers, researchers, educators, entrepreneurs, and community folks in an assessment and outreach effort that illuminates the needs, capabilities, and constraints that each works with on a daily basis.

Finally, SAMAB is building a World-Wide-Web-based Southern Appalachian Regional Information System that will enable information exchange and widespread access to information, models, and maps. This system will make information and analysis technology much more accessible and will be a major tool for future assessments and public and private visioning and planning.