

A COOPERATION PLAN

FOR THE

RIDING MOUNTAIN BIOSPHERE RESERVE

29 April, 2002.

I. INTRODUCTION

A Biosphere Reserve is an area proposed by its residents, ratified by a national committee, and designated by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), which demonstrates innovative approaches to living and working in harmony with nature. Worldwide, there are more than 400 Biosphere Reserves, in 91 countries. There are currently 11 in Canada, with 2 more in the final approval stage (Figure 1).

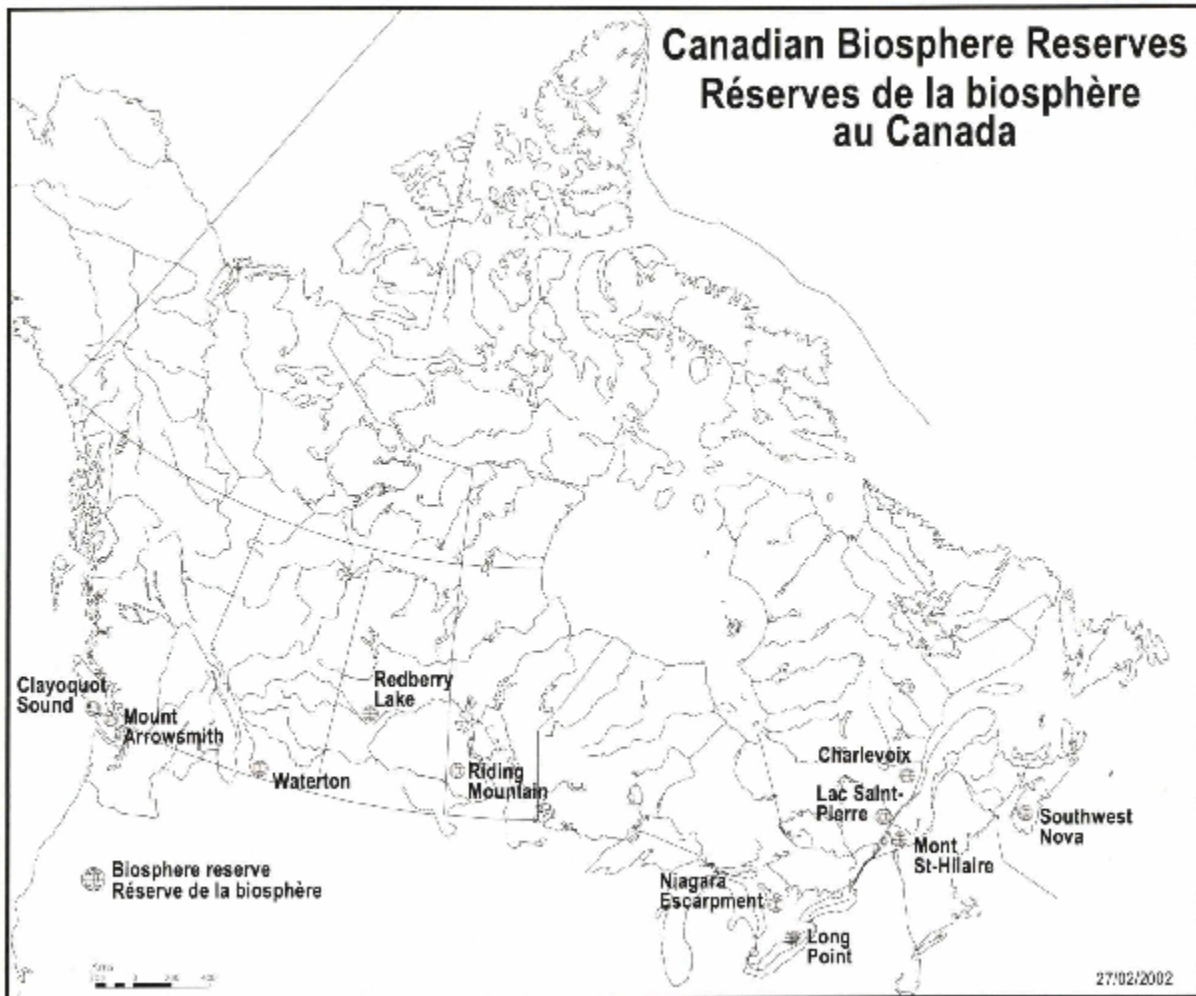


Figure 1. Map of Biosphere Reserve Locations.

The word "Biosphere" means "sphere of life" and is the part of planet Earth where life occurs. The word "Reserve" means that it is an important area of the world that has been recognized for its special qualities. UNESCO uses a word that can be translated and understood in different countries. "Reserve" does not mean that these places are set aside from human use and development - human activity and the health of people and communities are an essential part of the Biosphere Reserve program. Taken together, the words "Biosphere Reserve" highlight a

special area within the biosphere where people demonstrate better approaches to conservation and sustainable resource use.

Each Biosphere Reserve includes a core area, where natural processes go on as removed as possible from human activity. Core areas are important conservators of genetic diversity and ecosystem function, and act as reference points on the natural state of the ecosystems represented by the Biosphere Reserve. Information from these core areas may be used to assess the sustainability of activities, or the maintenance of environmental quality, in the surrounding areas.

The core area is surrounded by the Area of Cooperation, where people live and work, and where the goal of sustainable resource use is explored and encouraged through research, education, and community-based planning. “Cooperation” with each other, with the natural world, and with the rest of human society is seen as being essential to achieving sustainability.

UNESCO has no authority or regulatory powers within a Biosphere Reserve, and wants none. Government jurisdictions and private rights remain as they were before designation. A stakeholder’s signature on a nomination document implies only a moral commitment, not legal commitment, to cooperate with others to achieve the objectives of the Biosphere Reserve.

The three major functions of a Biosphere Reserve are: Conservation of Biodiversity and Ecosystem Processes, Sustainable Development, and Support for Logistics. The term “logistics” refers to the activities of education, research, training and monitoring which partners in a Biosphere Reserve provide in support of conservation and development. Education, research, and training help to build local capacity to make sound decisions, and to meet their own needs in their own way. It also provides opportunities to draw together broad-based support from all sectors of the community.

Residents and organizations in a Biosphere Reserve use a variety of activities to address conservation and sustainable development in ways that are meaningful for them; they also have opportunities to share their discoveries with others. This will often occur informally, as people in the surrounding region notice the development of community-based expertise in a Biosphere Reserve, and want to find out more about it. There are also formal networks for sharing information. The Canadian Biosphere Reserves Association (CBRA) provides national communication and coordination for its member Biosphere Reserves, and the Canadian Biosphere Reserve Student and Research Network advises post-secondary students and researchers on Biosphere Reserve studies. Internationally, UNESCO supports the world network of Biosphere Reserves, which facilitates meetings, exchanges, and communication. There are joint projects and studies at both the national and international levels.

UNESCO has been encouraging Biosphere Reserve committees to develop Management Plans or Coordination Plans to increase their effectiveness. In countries such as Canada, where Biosphere Reserves have no authority over land use, and where activities depend on cooperation, the term *Cooperation Plan* is more appropriate. Our plan has been developed for the residents, businesses and other organizations and agencies of the Biosphere Reserve, and is strongly based on partnerships. In it, the goals for the three functions of the Biosphere Reserve are joined with

the challenges and actions that best reflect local needs and desires. This cooperative approach encourages innovation, fosters pride in local achievements, and creates a desire to share these experiences within Canada and with other countries around the world.

II. BACKGROUND

The Riding Mountain Biosphere Reserve (RMBR) was designated in 1986, following application to UNESCO from the 15 municipal councils which make up the area of cooperation, by the Province of Manitoba, and by Riding Mountain National Park (RMNP), which forms the core area (Figure 2).

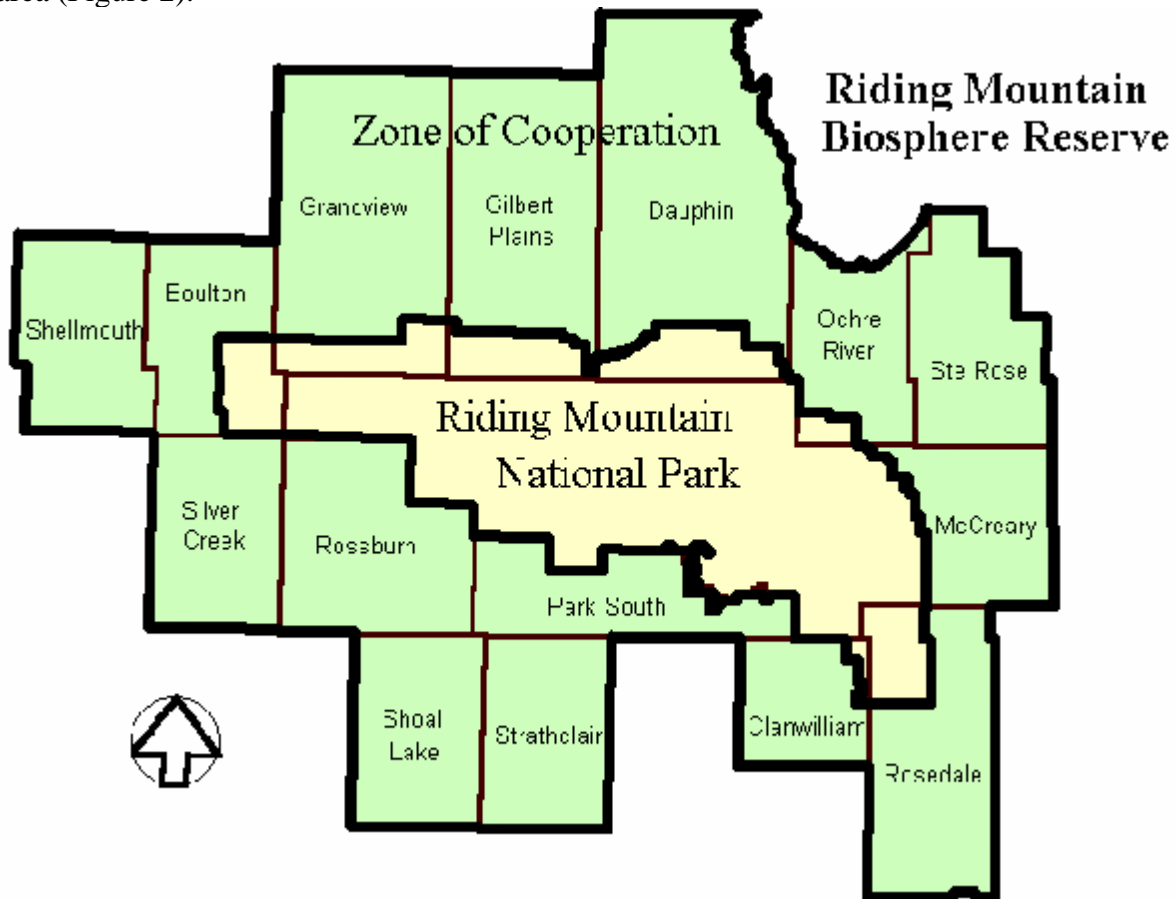


Figure 2. Structure of the Riding Mountain Biosphere Reserve in 1986.

The core area covers some 3000 square kilometres of mixedwood forest (white spruce and trembling aspen, known locally as white poplar), eastern deciduous forest (ash, oak, elm, and cottonwood), and rough fescue prairie. The surrounding area of cooperation comprises an additional 12,000 square kilometres, containing 15,000 residents, and has largely been developed for the growing of grain and forage crops, and for the production of livestock. In addition, the area is rich in lakes, streams and natural habitat, and hunting, guiding, and ecotourism contribute to the local economy.

The core area was set aside as a Dominion Forest Reserve in 1895, and became a National Park in 1933. The area of the Biosphere Reserve was home to Aboriginal Peoples for millenia, and currently, contains 4 First Nations Reserves. Settlement by peoples from Scandinavia, the Ukraine, and the United Kingdom began in the late 1870's, and is continuing.

The Biosphere Reserve is managed by a committee composed of municipal council appointees, supported by *ex officio* members from Federal and Provincial government departments. The major funding source has been a \$5000 annual grant from Parks Canada, but municipal funding has been significant as well in that the councils provide support for their representatives to attend meetings, and often provide meeting rooms and other expenses for committee work.

Major activities in the early years include the organization of an annual conference directed at municipal leaders on topics including 'Climate Change and Farmers', 'Hunting, Farming, and National Parks', 'Farm Chemicals and Sustainable Agriculture', 'Dammed by Beaver', and 'The Potential of Poplar'. In addition, we provided some financial support to graduate students doing theses on topics of interest to the committee; for example, 'A Synthesis of Biosphere Reserve Natural Resource Data', 'Attitudes to Wildlife', 'Attitudes to the Wolf', 'New Approaches to Beaver Management', 'Habitat Suitability for Lynx', 'The State of Knowledge Regarding Climate Change', 'Effects on Plant Biodiversity of Cattle Grazing', and 'Elk Movement Patterns'. Committee meetings also serve an important forum for communication between local people through their municipal councils, Provincial Government Departments, and the National Park.

About 4 years ago, it was realized that some continuity had been lost, since the current members of municipal council were not those who had participated in the designation process. The committee undertook to visit all councils, updating them on activities, and asking for additional appointees. The result was a rejuvenated management committee, with increased activity.

The Ecological Monitoring and Assessment Network (EMAN) of Environment Canada provided support through the Science Horizons Program for the RMBR to undertake a landscape change study, and to set up an SI/MAB plot. The Rural Municipality of Park donated an office, Parks Canada provided funding for a part-time coordinator, and the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration (Agriculture and Agri-food Canada) funded work as part of a regional planning initiative. The TD Bank Friends of the Environment fund has supported habitat restoration projects and the Biosphere Reserve has lately had an important role in communications under the Tuberculosis in Elk and Cattle Project, which is both provincially and federally funded. The RMBR has also participated with the Nature Conservancy in Endangered Species work.

The Biosphere Reserve underwent a UNESCO-required 10 year review 2 years ago, and the recommendations of that review have been incorporated into the Cooperation Plan development process.

The community mosaic of the Biosphere Reserve is currently undergoing rapid change, largely as a result of changes to the prairie agricultural economy. But coming out of these changes are increasing opportunities for the Biosphere Reserve to assist in the development of a sustainable economy containing a truly sustainable community structure.

III. COOPERATION PLAN DEVELOPMENT

Work on the plan began about 2 years ago as part of the rejuvenation process described above, with a facilitated visioning workshop for municipal councils, organizations, and government. One result of this visioning exercise was that activities of the Biosphere Reserve were to be directed toward education, information, and communication.

Work under the current funding began in December 2001 and will continue to mid-June 2002. The management committee delegated responsibility for plan development to a 7-person planning committee, including the current part-time coordinator. The management committee has met 3 times, and the planning committee 4 times in the course of plan development. Several meetings between the coordinator and municipal councils and other organizations have been held, but major input was obtained at a facilitated meeting attended by 37 individuals representing potential partners and Biosphere Reserve residents (Appendix 1). The results from this meeting were circulated to 18 municipal councils for reaction and additions. This document was then prepared, but plan refinement will continue through May and June, as the finished document is circulated and presented for reaction and communication purposes to a wide range of groups, individuals, and government departments.

IV. VISION/MISSION

To foster and encourage, through research, information exchange, education, and communication, a sustainable community-based regional economy, with high biodiversity, landscape, and social values, and with Riding Mountain National Park as a key component.

V. CHALLENGES

- First Nations involvement in the management committee.
- An increase in provincial government involvement.
- An increase in activities and programming related to sustainable development and sustainable communities.
- A more inclusive membership structure for the management committee.
- The size and diversity of the area of cooperation being represented by a single management committee.

VI. GOALS FOR THE 3 KEY FUNCTIONS OF A BIOSPHERE RESERVE

A. MAIN PRIORITIES FOR BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION

Document trends regarding biodiversity and landscape in the area of cooperation:

More information is required on trends in the area's resources, landscape, and people with a view to developing local indicators of trends. Information on endangered species is also desired.

Economic studies on the value of landscape and biodiversity:

It is generally agreed that one of the keys to sustainable development is a diverse landscape, which can support a diverse economy. Documentation of this thesis through data collection and studies is desired.

Biosphere Reserve to act as a coordinator and source of information for programs from other agencies which encourage habitat and biodiversity:

There are a large number of provincial and national agencies as well as NGO's like Ducks Unlimited and the Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation with programming which supports a biodiverse landscape. Making landowners aware of the availability and procedures for obtaining this programming should be expedited by the Biosphere Reserve, where possible.

Biosphere Reserve to act as a data warehouse for information and studies on regional resources:

With the coming of high capability microcomputers and user-friendly Geographical Information Systems (GIS), it has become possible for all geographical information on an area to be housed in a relatively easily accessed GIS format. The Data Manager at RMNP manages such data for the Park; it is suggested that the Biosphere Reserve take on this role for the area of cooperation.

B. MAIN PRIORITIES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Increasing school programming, including the UNESCO-Associated Schools Program:

Educational activities should more strongly be focussed on schools, in both biodiversity conservation and sustainable development. The RMBR should be making better use of our national and international ties, and investigation of participation in the UNESCO-Associated Schools Program is a logical first step.

Research and monitoring to determine where our local and regional economies are heading:

There is widespread concern within the area of cooperation over the impact of continuing changes to the agricultural economy, and the process of globalization on our communities. Studies on where this is heading are a first step to effective regional planning.

Promotion of the development of a comprehensive vision for the area around the Park:

Sustainable development and sustainable communities require a determination of where we have come from, where we are heading, and opportunities or alternatives available. The Biosphere Reserve should have a key role in the provision of the required information, and in leading the process of the development of a such a vision.

C. MAIN PRIORITIES FOR CAPACITY BUILDING

Change governance structure to become more inclusive:

Municipal council appointment is currently the only way to formally participate in the management of the Biosphere Reserve. A governance structure which maintains the strong ties to municipal government but also allows for the inclusion of other interested individuals should be explored.

Secure funding for a full-time coordinator:

In order to sustain and increase the current level of activity, a full-time coordinator is required.

Move toward gender and age parity on the committee:

A UNESCO operating principle is gender parity, and the Canadian Commission for UNESCO is currently trying to increase youth involvement. The composition of our management committee reflects the composition of most municipal councils in that it is composed of 'experienced' men.

More activities in local schools:

More effective communication with municipalities, residents, and partners:

Although improving, communication efforts using a variety of media should be increased to raise the level of awareness about the Biosphere Reserve and current and past projects, and to increase partnership activity with other agencies.

VII. ROLES OF BIOSPHERE RESERVE PARTNERS

D. Participating person, group, or organization:

Municipal councils and appointees operate the Biosphere Reserve; Parks Canada controls our core area, and is an increasingly active partner outside the Park; graduate students from a number of universities have done research; EMAN and PFRA (federal agencies) and the Nature Conservancy have engaged us in partnerships on projects; TD Friends of the Environment have funded restoration work; Conservation Districts and the Rolling River School Division are active partners.

E. Potential Partners:

The list is long, considering the purpose of the Biosphere Reserve and the number of partners with similar interests in the area. But there is high potential for engaging in partnerships related to sustainable development with appropriate federal departments like NR CAN, Agriculture and Food, and Fisheries and Oceans, with the provincial departments of Intergovernmental Affairs (particularly through the Conservation Districts and Rural Development Programs), Conservation, and Agriculture, with municipal planning districts and community development corporations, with NGO's like the Pembina Institute, and with foundations and other

fundings with an interest in the Biosphere Reserve mandate. Federal Foreign Affairs, NGO's like the Marquis Project, and school divisions are potential partners considering our international linkages. The Rural Development Program at Assiniboine Community College in Brandon has particular potential for a continuing relationship.

VIII. TOOLS FOR COORDINATION OF BIOSPHERE RESERVE ACTIVITIES

Regular meetings are well attended (20 people) and provide a good forum for information sharing and planning. But the greatest strength is a strong linkage to municipal councils, providing a strong network for 2 way communication. Municipal councillors and offices have been very effective in providing local contacts and sites for research and pilot project activities. Membership in the Canadian Biosphere Reserves Association and being part of the UNESCO network position the Biosphere Reserve well for carrying out national and international work. RMNP has been generous in the provision of logistical support.

IX. RESOURCES TO ACHIEVE THE PRIORITY GOALS

F. Current resources

The Biosphere Reserve currently has \$15,000 in uncommitted funding, a part-time paid coordinator for another year, a donated office in the Rural Municipality of Park building in Onanole, and large and enthusiastic attendance at management committee meetings. Visibility is slowly improving, with the result that the Biosphere Reserve is attracting more partners and graduate students, while increasing the involvement of long-time partners like RMNP.

G. Lacking resources

A full-time coordinator is necessary to begin the implementation of this plan. A full-time national coordinator for CBRA is required to initiate and coordinate national and international projects and partners.

X. PROPOSED PROJECTS OR INITIATIVES TO ACHIEVE PRIORITY GOALS

H. Short-term

- Fund a coordinator/executive director with responsibilities for communication, education, fund-raising, and partnership development.
- Implement more activities with local schools.

I. Medium-term

- Establish a data warehouse containing an inventory of geographical information.
- Institute studies on the regional economy and on the economic value of a varied landscape and high biodiversity.

XI. WHAT WAS LEARNED DEVELOPING THE COOPERATION PLAN?

That the Biosphere Reserve concept captures people's interest, with the result that the development of the plan was met with optimism and enthusiasm.

Appendix 1.

ATTENDEES AT THE
BIOSPHERE RESERVE COOPERATION PLAN MEETING
MARCH 18, 2002
LEGION HALL, ERICKSON

Amanda Naughton	facilitator, graduate in Rural Dev., Assiniboine College, Brandon
Megan Tremaine	Rural Development student, Assiniboine Community College
Jennifer Clark	“
Diane Potter	“
Amanda Skrumeda	“
Victor Parrott	“
Carissa Caruk	“
Jacie Skelton	Rural Development Instructor, Assiniboine Community College
Aldin R. Foy	Graduate Student, Brandon University Rural Dev. Inst.
Jack Squance	Councillor, R.M. of Grandview, vice-chair liaison ctte.
Nick Fiarchuk	Councillor, R.M. of Grandview, Biosphere Reserve Ctte.
Mona Cornock	Regional Director, MB Agriculture and Food, Brandon
Ed Kulchyski	Councillor, R.M. of Strathclair, Biosphere Reserve Ctte.
Dan Chranowski	Biologist, MB Conservation, Brandon
Mac Estabrooks	Riding Mountain Biosphere Reserve committee
Kelvin Mazur	Councillor, R.M. of Silver Creek
Bob McNabb	Landowner and farmer, Minnedosa
Bob Enns	Regional Director, MB Conservation, Brandon
Risa Olekshy	Biologist, Fisheries and Oceans, Dauphin
Darryl Stroh	MB Intergovernmental Affairs, Rural Development, Birtle
Brent McCannell	Regional Director, MB Agriculture and Food, Dauphin
Wally Yanchycki	Mayor, Town of Erickson, and Trustee, R.R. School Division
Rudy Usick	R.M. of Clanwilliam and MB Lodge and Outfitters Ass'n.
Brian Pearce	Erickson Wildlife Association
Frank Faschauner	Erickson, local trapper.
Bill Stilwell	Communications, Riding Mountain Biosphere Reserve
Renske Kaastra	Farmer, and MB Sustainable Agriculture Ass'n., Rosssburn.
Vince Crichton	Senior Scientist, MB Conservation, Winnipeg.
Jack Dubois	Director, Wildlife and Ecosystem Protection, MB Conservation
Paul Tarleton	Manager, Ecosystem Secretariat, Riding Mountain National Park
Marcy Nylen-Nemetchuk	Conservation Districts Office, MB Intergovernmental Affairs
Robert Sopuck	Past Director, MB Sustainable Development Coordinating Unit.
Jim Irwin	Past Chair, Riding Mountain Biosphere Reserve
John Whitaker	Chair, Riding Mountain Biosphere Reserve
Ray Frey	Reeve, R.M. of Park
Marg Tarleton	Friends of the Park, and graduate student, Rural Dev. Brandon U.
Ute Holweger	Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, Winnipeg.

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