

Subject: Comments on science funding process – Vernon Gilbert, 8/28/2003

I am pleased that OSTP is conducting a cross-agency review of science funding policies and practices. A key approach should be to develop policies and practices to integrate today's relatively independent science activities into systems that more effectively address the needs of society. The Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA), for example, deals more with individual agency performance than it does with "government" performance.

In 1979 OSTP and OMB recognized the value of the U.S. Man and the Biosphere Program as an effective integrating mechanism for federal agency science and natural resource management programs. In a memorandum to key federal agencies OSTP and OMB called for the development of a national plan, which included "Cooperative Regional Demonstration Projects." These projects were requested especially by officials in OSTP. The Southern Appalachian Man and the Biosphere (SAMAB) Program resulted from this initiative, and SAMAB has benefited this region in spite of its modest and unpredictable funding.

I suggest that OSTP, in the regional workshops, take a look at ways to help renew the USMAB Program, and how to use it to help to achieve cross-agency practices in environmental and natural resources sciences. If responsible use of public resources is to be demonstrated, it will have to be through agencies' planning and working together on issues of common concern. SAMAB would be a good case study.

A renewal of the U.S. MAB Program will help in fulfilling President Bush's commitment to rejoin UNESCO and participate fully in its mission. A part of this would be to collaborate with our MAB colleagues in Canada and Mexico who have asked us to join them in using our biosphere reserves for research to conserve and enhance the natural environment and the biodiversity that our countries share. At the Fifth Conference of Science and Management of Protected Areas Association (SAMPAA) held in Victoria, BC, Canada in May, 2003, 450 participants unanimously resolved to support the biosphere reserves program as a practical means to achieve collaboration, and to establish an effective and functional North American Biosphere Reserve Network. Canadian and Mexican MAB representatives have been invited to the Southern Appalachians in the spring of 2004 for further planning toward this goal.

Please let me know your response to these suggestions. I will be pleased to help, for I believe a change in the funding process could bring significant improvements in collaborative science activities.

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