

Biosphere Reserve Opportunities for Ka`u

What is a Biosphere Reserve?

The United Nations Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Man and the Biosphere (MAB) program (Biosphere Reserve Program) consists of a dynamic and interactive network of sites around the globe that are recognized for their roles in conserving genetic resources; facilitating long-term research and monitoring; and encouraging education, training, and the demonstration of sustainable resource use. The program encourages the participation of local communities and land owners to develop ways to sustainably manage the natural and cultural resources while allowing sustainable development within the area. Special projects, research, policies and regional and international cooperation are some of the ways that biosphere reserves have developed their programs.

Hawaii Volcanoes National Park (HAVO) has been recognized as an International Biosphere Reserve and a World Heritage Site. This designation provides opportunities for adjacent land areas to participate in the Biosphere Reserve Program and develop projects, policies, and practices to manage, protect, and conduct research within designated areas.

Making it work for Ka`u –

The Biosphere Reserve Program provides opportunities for Ka`u community members and interested stakeholders to develop sustainably, contribute to research and management, develop training and youth programs, and protect key core areas from threats. The most important component for success is that the local stakeholders and community understand the Biosphere Reserve Program and volunteer to engage in the process to develop a program for Ka`u. It must be a ground up approach to enable buy in and participation. The National Park Service (NPS) can provide technical expertise if the community would like to develop programs, projects, and (or) guidelines as part of the Biosphere Reserve Program.

Why now?

There are a number of reasons why now is the perfect time. First, the County is currently updating the Ka`u Community Development Plan (CDP). This plan could facilitate the introduction of the Biosphere Reserve Program to the community. Since community outreach has been conducted, there are opportunities to develop a dialog with the community and/or key stakeholders on how the Biosphere Reserve Program could meet their concerns and visions for the future of Ka`u. Second, HAVO is in the process of updating their General Management Plan. This provides opportunities for public engagement and partnering. Third, the Pacific Biosphere Reserve Network (PacMAB) offers opportunities and information sharing to develop and sustain local programs and practices. HAVO, as members of the PacMAB, can potentially obtain assistance from other successful programs to help develop a locally based program that works for the stakeholders and communities in Ka`u. A basic plan or approach could then be developed at the community/stakeholder level to initiate involvement in the Biosphere Reserve Program.