

Fitzgerald Biosphere Reserve: a framework for achieving ecological and community sustainability ... or is it?

Angela Sanders



Introduction

The south coast of Western Australia has two large-scale conservation initiatives; the Gondwana Link project (see Chapter 3) and the Fitzgerald Biosphere Reserve project. The two are not mutually exclusive – they share some overlap in geographical area, interest groups, local government areas, aspirations and challenges. In this chapter, I will give an outline of the Fitzgerald Biosphere Reserve, the nature of its landscape, social and cultural setting, its dynamic beginnings and how the locals are now rekindling their interest in the biosphere reserve concept.

In 1975–76 the Western Australian Government was asked to nominate areas for designation under UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere (MAB) program. The Fitzgerald River National Park (FRNP), together with 11 other areas, was nominated and was subsequently approved as an internationally recognised Biosphere Reserve in April 1978 (Davis and Drake 1983).

Although there have been several shifts in emphasis in the way biosphere reserves function since their inception in 1971, Fry (2010) describes their consistent interrelated functions as:

- conservation: landscapes, ecosystems, species and genetic variation;
- development: economic, human and culturally adapted; and
- logistic support: research, monitoring, environmental education and training.