



U.S. Biosphere Network 2026 Summit – Recap and Future Steps



New Jersey Pinelands Commission
July 10, 2026

What is a Biosphere?

- Biospheres are “places where science, culture, and inclusive government come together, showing how biodiversity conservation and sustainable development can successfully go hand in hand,” according to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (or UNESCO).

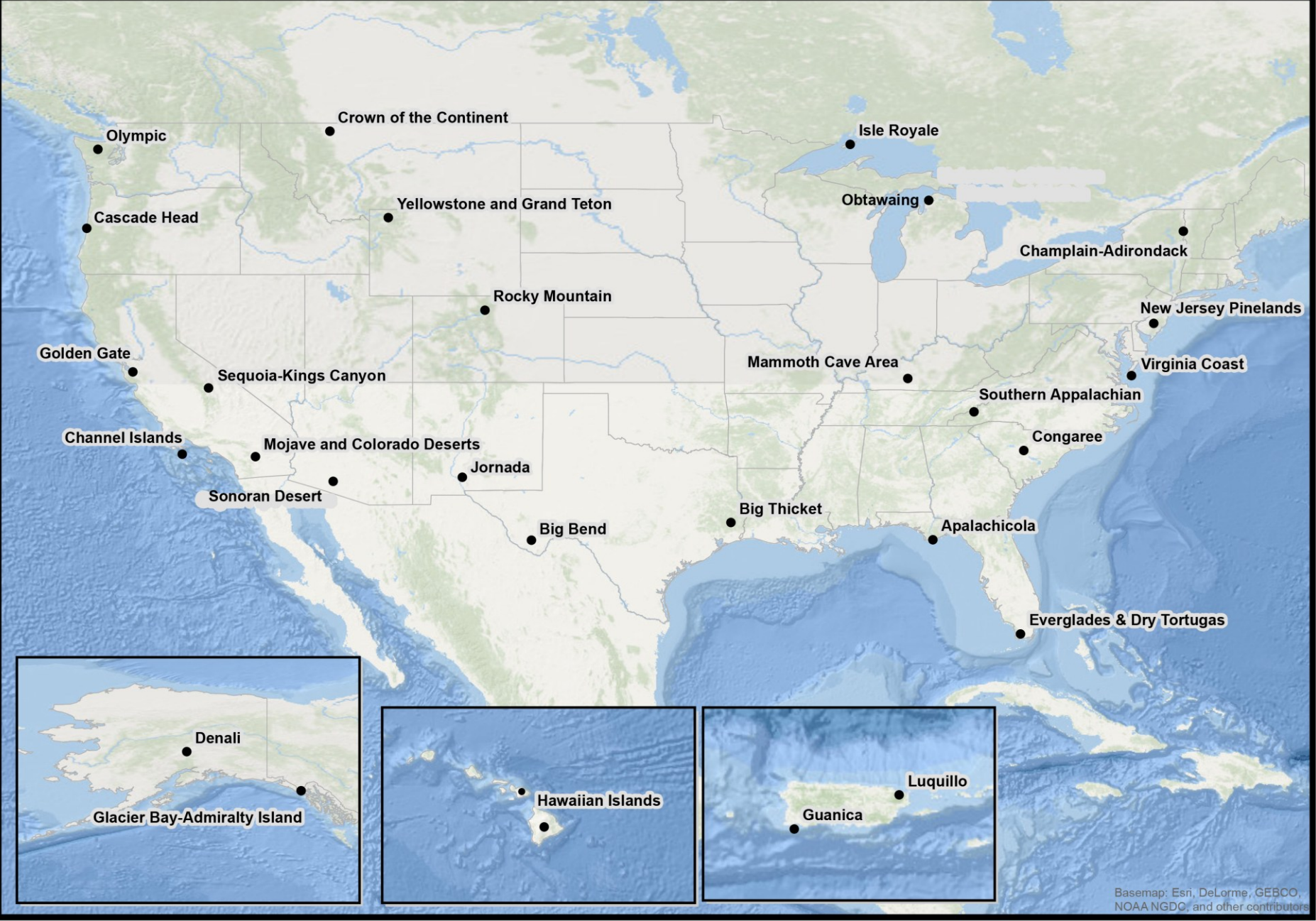




The New Jersey Pinelands Biosphere Region

- The New Jersey Pinelands Biosphere Region was designated by UNESCO as part of the Man and Biosphere Programme in 1983.
- It is one of 28 internationally recognized and designated Biosphere Regions in the U.S. Four hundred and fifty million people live in the 797 UNESCO-designated Biospheres throughout the world.
- The Pinelands Commission, an independent state agency with federal, state, and local representation, manages the Pinelands Biosphere.

Biosphere Regions in the United States



The New Jersey Pinelands Biosphere Region

The New Jersey Pinelands Biosphere Region exemplifies a collaborative approach to environmental preservation, involving partnerships among various governmental and non-governmental entities. Established in 1978 as the country's first National Reserve, the Pinelands encompass over one million acres of diverse ecosystems, including forests, wetlands, and aquatic habitats.

In 1983, the area was designated as a U.S. Biosphere Region by UNESCO, reflecting its global ecological significance. The management of this vast region is overseen by the [New Jersey Pinelands Commission](#), which operates in partnership with federal, state, and local governments, as well as private stakeholders. This cooperative framework aims to balance conservation efforts with sustainable development, ensuring the protection of the Pinelands' unique natural and cultural resources. To view the 2024 Pinelands Commission's Annual Report, [click here](#).

Biosphere Benefits

- International recognition
- Shared ideas, project partnerships, and collaboration, including the creation of a new Pinelands Biosphere Story Map.

<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/713a327011a544dbb9404f2e3149e536>

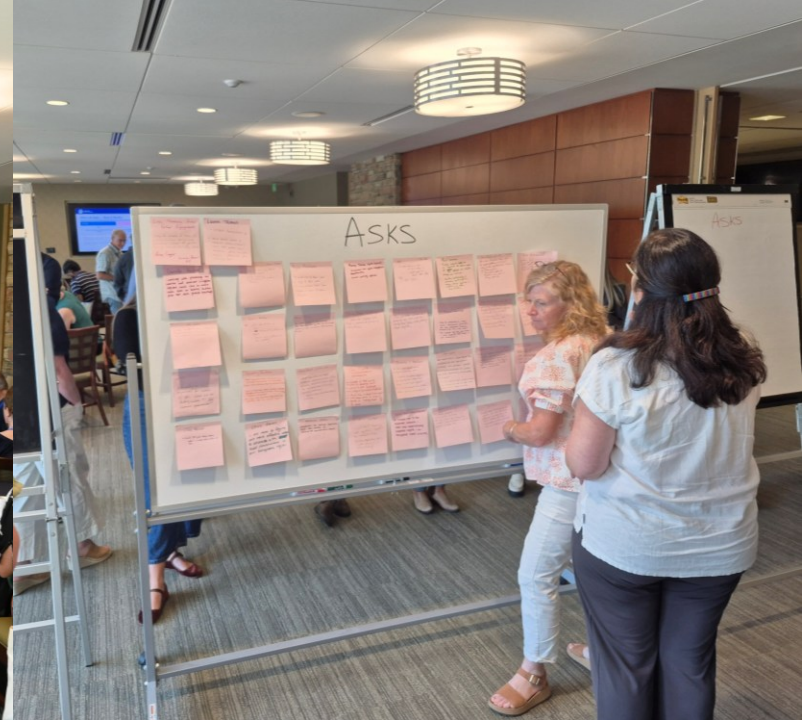
The U.S. Biosphere Network's 2026 Summit

- Held at Colorado State University in Fort Collins on June 22-25, 2026.
- The nonprofit U.S. Biosphere Network (USBN) organized/funded the Summit.
- The USBN is a nationwide network that guides, funds, and supports individual Biosphere Regions within the U.S. It collectively stewards internationally recognized areas of ecological importance, diversity, and cultural significance. Its last Biosphere Summit was 10 years ago.



“We are stronger together”

- Fifteen of the 28 U.S. Biosphere Regions participated in the Summit.
- Participants learned about the benefits of Biospheres, delivered talks about their work, and discussed shared interests and opportunities to build upon successes and address challenges.
- I delivered a talk on education and outreach in the Pinelands.



Phantom Canyon Preserve

Even where you stand, the Great Plains stretch out for more than 1,000 miles. To the west, the foothills of the Rockies rise 8,000 feet to the top of the Medicine Iron Range. In this transition zone between prairie and mountains lies a place as unexpected as its name, Phantom Canyon.

HISTORY

Man's presence in the area is documented by archaeological evidence. Over the years, the area has been used for a variety of purposes, from hunting to farming.

GEOLOGY

The area is characterized by its unique geological features, including the Medicine Iron Range and the surrounding mountains.

Life in the canyon



DOING RESEARCH
Researchers have been studying the area for many years, using a variety of methods to collect data.

TAKING INVENTORY

The area is home to a variety of plants and animals, many of which are rare or endangered.



**Take a Hike: Exploring the
Phantom Canyon Preserve,
located within the Rocky
Mountain Biosphere Region**

Phantom Canyon Preserve

The Nature Conservancy owns and manages the 1,120-acre preserve, which provides refuge for hundreds of plant species, including the globally rare Larimer aletes (*Aletes humilis*), as well as pronghorn antelopes, mountain lions, bighorn sheep, rattlesnakes, golden eagles and bald eagles.



Short films about Biospheres in the U.S.

We watched several 10-minute films highlighting different U.S. Biosphere regions, then discussed the possibility of creating a film about the Pinelands Biosphere Region.



New Jersey Pinelands Biosphere Reserve
Periodic Review 2016



Periodic Review

- All Biospheres are required to submit a Periodic Review report to UNESCO's Man and Biosphere Program (MAB) every 10 years to retain their designation as a Biosphere Region.
- We submitted our 128-page Periodic Review Report in 2016 and successfully retained our designation in 2017. Our next Periodic Review Report would be due in fall 2027.

Takeaways and Possible Next Steps

The United States will withdraw as a member state of UNESCO on December 31, 2026. As a result, the UNESCO MAB Program is temporarily relaxing the upcoming deadlines for biosphere regions such as the New Jersey Pinelands BR to submit their ten-year Periodic Review Reports.

The USBN has advised us that all U.S. Biosphere Regions will continue to maintain their UNESCO recognition in good standing during this interim period.





Takeaways and Possible Next Steps

The USBN has urged all U.S. Biospheres to complete an online self-assessment, which will help in the preparation of a Periodic Review Report, if the U.S. re-enters the Biosphere program in two years. By completing the self-assessment, U.S. Biospheres will demonstrate their commitment to the program and its goals.

Several Biospheres expressed concerns about staffing and the need for more funding, along with a desire to find opportunities to work with other Biospheres with similar challenges.

Takeaways and Possible Next Steps

We should complete the self-assessment provided by the USBN.

We should explore opportunities to work with other Biospheres with similar interests.

We should consider creating a 10-minute Biosphere film, with the assistance of the USBN.

We should seek to identify a Pinelands representative who will serve on the USBN Youth Group, which includes members who are aged 18-35.

USBN Biosphere Youth Group



Questions?

