



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

REGION 5

77 WEST JACKSON BOULEVARD

CHICAGO, IL 60604-3590

JUL 13 2005

REPLY TO THE ATTENTION OF:

R-19J

Dr. M. Granger Morgan
Chair, U.S. EPA Science Advisory Board
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20460

Re: SAB Review of the EPA Region 5 Critical Ecosystem Assessment Model

Thank you for this opportunity to respond to the Science Advisory Board (SAB) review of the Region 5 Critical Ecosystem Assessment Model (CrEAM; EPA-SAB-05-011). We find the review to be thorough, carefully considered, and thus very useful.

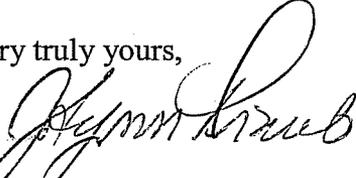
The review was helpful in identifying the valid potential uses of the model. We now plan to introduce it to the Region 5 staff as a tool they can use to assist in the allocation of internal EPA resources for site inspection activities, tracking general trends in regional landscape quality and reviewing grant proposals submitted to the Agency. We also plan to use it as a framework to foster further communication and dialogue between other federal and state agencies on the use of regional and spatial data in environmental decision-making.

We understand the SAB has identified uses of the CrEAM that are not currently supported. It *cannot* be used in decision-making on regulatory matters, including air or water permitting, NEPA reviews, setting compliance, enforcement or cleanup actions and establishing reference context for ecological protection and restoration. These uses might be appropriate in the future if the model were modified in the ways suggested by the report. The detailed response to the charge questions, particularly as they pertain to the data used in the model was appreciated. They provide a clear direction for us to proceed should we decide to invest resources in a further refined CrEAM, as was recommended. We will bring them to your attention if we decide to do this.

The review places a great deal of emphasis on the field validation of the model and endorses the process we are proposing for validation. I am happy to report that the field work is in progress using evaluation protocols developed through a Regional Applied Research Program (RARE) grant. These protocols, referred to as 4x4 ecological assessments, (assessments done by four people in four hours) will potentially be very useful in not only validating CrEAM, but also in measuring ecological progress in program activities.

Again, we appreciate the SAB's review of this Region 5 product and the contributions that review brings to sound science in regional activities.

Very truly yours,



Bharat Mathur

for Bharat Mathur
Acting Regional Administrator