

ESA Vegetation Classification Panel Meeting Notes

Tuesday, August 12, 2014

ESA Annual Meeting; Sacramento, CA

In Attendance:

Alexa McKerrow, Marianne Burke, Cliff Duke, Julie Evens, Todd Keeler-Wolf, Janet Franklin, Jill Parsons, Scott Franklin, Kim Quach, Valerie Eviner, Bob Peet, Chris Lea, Ayzik Solomeshch, Denny Grossman (On the phone: Don Faber-Langendoen, Pat Comer, Alan Weakley, Este Muldavin)

Status Reports:

FGDC Subcommittee Update

- The MOU is now finalized.
- The NVC publication that has been completed by the Hierarchy Revisions Working Group (HRWG) is currently being edited and set up for publication. USFS will pay for publishing the paper with 2015 funds.

Yearly Accomplishments/Highlights

- Completion of the Peer Review Testing Project: the team is asking for FGDC Veg Subcommittee feedback on the process they developed.
- Completion of one workshop at ESA last year, and one workshop at the National Military Fish and Wildlife Association (NMFWA) meeting in Denver (March 2014).
- Work on producing and peer-reviewing Macrogroup descriptions is ongoing.

Update on USFS 2015-2017 Proposal Submission:

- Cliff provided an overview of the draft proposal budget; we can adjust the scope depending on what USFS funds are available.
- Marianne recommended using this year's funding level as a model for the level of funding available next year.
- Our goal is to secure as much funding as possible to ensure NVC implementation goes smoothly; tracking down any loose ends is time-consuming and we need to ensure quality control.
- **Cliff will send the draft budget and proposal to Marianne** (*note: completed*).
- **Marianne will run the budget and proposal by USFS grants and contracts to see if any red flags come up and will keep Cliff informed.**

Discussion of Changes to L1-L3:

Class 2

- This Class has the most changes proposed, including proposing a new Subclass.
- 2.C.4 should have a shorter name – change to Temperate to Polar (NOT lumping 2.C.2 and 2.C.4).
- 2.C.3 should also be changed to Temperate to Polar.
- The Panel approved these changes.

Class 6

- The suggestion is to delete two Subclasses and include those Subclasses into Class 3 and 4, so they would come out somewhere else lower down (Division).
- There were concerns that some categories were too constraining; Bob recommended using the terms “warm desert” and “semi desert” to avoid constraints.

Class 1

- The Panel discussed the naming terms for wooded vegetation, and agreed that the old definition (“forest to open woodland”) is preferable.
- **Don will relay the Panel’s recommendation back to the HRWG.**
- **Don will also discuss these possible changes and their impact on the L1 Key with Dave Tart.**

Macrogroup (MG) Review Progress:

- All 160 MG descriptions are written and ready to be reviewed.
- Reviewers are sending in review forms, as well as descriptions with edits in track-changes mode; files are being maintained to show how description authors are responding to and incorporating reviewer comments.
- At this point, most of the reviewer comments are editorial.
- The remaining MGs to be reviewed (55) will go out for review tomorrow (August 13th).
- For the MG Meeting in October, we will plan to use the last half-day as a wrap-up, to finish any unfinished business.
- **Don will send an email to the Panel and PRB asking for volunteers to act as Regional Associate Editors (AEs).**

Discussion on Ruderal MGs:

- We want to formulate an action plan to produce pilot studies; this topic will come up in the October MG meeting.
- **Don will submit a list of what he has found in the MG review process, and a list of any issues to the Panel** (after the MGs are in the database at the end of August).
- **Don/Scott/Jill will help arrange a conference call approximately a month later (late September) to discuss any issues prior to the MG meeting.**
- **Don will let us know if we need to alter this timeline.**
- **Alexa is working with Don on developing range maps for MGs, and will try to get them sent out so people will have those for the October meeting.**

NVC Proceedings:

- ESA has agreed to house the NVC proceedings documents; the database for descriptions will be housed at NatureServe, and the plot database (VegBank) will continue to be housed at NCEAS.
- USGS is working with a contractor at GreenInfo to get the website up and running; they will work with the ESA Webmaster to get the online proceedings page up.
- We discussed adding a link to the Proceedings under the “Science” tab on the ESA website, to make it prominent/easier to find; the Proceedings will also link to usnvc.org.
- Some Panel members like the idea of nesting the Proceedings under ESA Journals, rather than Science (though Jill is unsure if this will be possible).

- **Alexa will put together a one-pager of what we want to do, and run it past Bob, Scott, Don, Cliff and Jill.**
- **Jill will investigate the following issues related to the NVC Proceedings and keep the Panel updated:**
 - o Can we assign dates of issue under the existing framework to the Proceedings?
 - o How can we ensure the longevity of the Proceedings? Can it be folding into a digital receptacle similar to the ESA Journals?
 - o What approval process would we have to go through to list the Proceedings under the ESA Journals?
- **Alexa will ask GreenInfo for advice on a standard style for the Proceedings (cover, font, etc).**
- Our goal is to launch the Proceedings by the end of 2014; **Scott will help establish a small working group to take this task forward.**
- **Jill/Kim will revisit the Panel website in the coming months.**

Copyediting/Quality Control for the NVC Proceedings

- We want to ensure that the final Proceedings do not contain typos or grammatical errors after peer review is complete.
- Panel members are interested in setting up a mechanism for copyediting new descriptions/changes to the NVC.
- **Jill will check into the possibility of finding an NVC copy editor and how that process would work administratively.**
- Depending on Jill's findings, this may be something new to incorporate into the USFS proposal and budget.

Review, Analysis, and Dynamic Content:

Chris gave an overview of the nuances of regional analyses; he will continue working on his analysis and keep the Panel updated on his findings.

Strategic Planning for VegBank:

Background:

- VegBank was designed in 2001-2002 and built in 2003, so lots of things have changed since then.
- We keep patching it to keep it working with new operating systems, but we need to migrate it to contemporary software. The underlying data model and data are solid, but we need updated infrastructure to house it.
- If we do this, we should go to an environment where there's more than one person working, since that would provide more stability and institutional memory moving forward.
- **Bob will continue conversations with NCEAS, brainstorm what resources we need to fully upgrade VegBank, and will help inform a budget for accomplishing this.**

Key questions/issues:

- Where should VegBank live?
- How can we introduce data exchange standards so that everyone is using VegEx (LANDFIRE, USFS Plots, etc.)?
- USGS in-house staff can help, but there's a communication issue because there's no interface between them and people who know the subject matter best.
- How can we make VegBank more user-friendly?

- How do we get partners to share their data?
- How much does fixing usability relate to the need to upgrade?

Discussion highlights:

- One idea is to add a counter on the VegBank Homepage that says: “we now have xxx plots in the database” (and we need a better homepage in general).
- Brainstorming with a small group would be helpful to determine how to make the interface more user-friendly.
- We should look at other similar efforts that need upgrading and see if we can cost-share and idea-share, while identifying key applications for the data.
- Briefing agencies in person (ESA, Panel, NatureServe) will continue to be important moving forward with this effort; the target agencies are those most involved in the FGDC Veg Subcommittee.
- We need more incentives for people to add their data, and we need to make it easier.
- The ability to get data out in mash-up format rather than as a download would be beneficial.
- In USFS there are lots of data requirements coming out (data has to be public and accessible before something is published); today’s discussion was useful for Marianne in her efforts to move this forward within USFS and get support.
- **Marianne will look into the possibility of having Bob speak to agencies in October since he’ll be in the area for the MG.**

Next Steps and Planning for the Joint Planning and PRB Meeting:

- We are planning another face-to-face meeting for next Spring (three days total for Panel and PRB, possibly mid-late May).
- We’d like to focus on NVC quality control, and examine all levels of the NVC at this meeting.
- How will we do the quality assessment? **This could be a major topic for the next Panel call.**
- We will consider doing lots of up-front work in advance to make the face-to-face time as productive and efficient as possible.

Proposed Activities and Publications:

- BLM workshop – early Feb in Sacramento at the Society for Range Management (SRM) Meeting.
 - o Todd and Alexa are working on this, since BLM is growing more active in the FGDC Subcommittee.
 - o They are proposing a one-day traveling field trip/workshop on February 6th, 2015; visiting around 3 different sites.
 - o The purpose will be to build the notion of compatibility and utility of the NVC, to demonstrate the value of the NVC, and possibly address how different classifications relate to each other in ways that address common challenges.
- Biodiversity without Boundaries (NatureServe meeting, April 20-24, 2015 in Michigan)
 - o We can develop a symposium, and speak to heritage programs and agencies at the NatureServe conference – the timing is good as the NVC is nearing completion.
 - o **Don will work on a proposal and schedule of talks, and send it out to the Panel.**
- IAVS/EVS
 - o We’ll have a better idea of which would be most useful once we know what is happening at each meeting .

- Panel/Veg Classification History Publication
 - o **Scott** will send an outline to the Panel and ask for comments, as well as feedback on the Panel History Poster.
 - o **Denny** and **Bob** volunteered to help Scott gather information.
 - o **Scott** will also ask Orie to help.

Possible Activities for the ESA Centennial in 2015:

- **Ayzik** will draft a SYMP proposal on the history of vegetation classification (due September 25).
 - o **Everyone** should send Ayzik ideas for topics/speakers, or to volunteer themselves.
 - o **Ayzik/Scott** will look into applying for ESA Centennial funding to bring international colleagues to ESA.
- **Chris** will work on a field trip proposal geared towards vegetation analysis.
 - o **Everyone** should send him ideas/comments.
 - o We could potentially link a field trip and a workshop (2 days).
 - o Gary Flemming would be a good speaker, or Judy Teague, and/or an NPS user.
 - o Alexa is willing to help.

Other Business:

- Janet is now on the IUCN Redlist of Ecosystems Science Standards Committee, and has been asked to review the vegetation maps that Pat/NatureServe has developed. The Panel decided that members should respond as individuals if they are interested in participating in the review.
- Ayzik, Scott, Todd, Don, and Este volunteered to participate in the NVC Keys Working Group – they are charged with thinking of a strategy to developing NVC keys.