

ESA Vegetation Panel Meeting Notes

Minneapolis, MN; Tuesday, August 6, 2013

Attendees: Este Muldavin, Orié Loucks, Todd Keeler-Wolf, Elizabeth Beyers, Cliff Duke, Don Faber-Langendoen, Scott Franklin, Dave Roberts, Marianne Burke, Bob Peet, Jill Parsons, Alexa McKerrow, Janet Franklin, Kristin Snow, Ken Baldwin, Peter Uhlig, Pat Comer, Chris Lea, Karl Brown, Michael Jennings

Status reports:

Vegetation Databases Workshop: (Dave)

- The workshop was led by Dave Roberts with help from Michael Lee, Don Wovcha, & others
- Approximately 15 people attended, including some experienced users and several graduate students
- Though there wasn't time for much analysis, the workshop showed that it was possible to reconcile/combine different veg databases, but the work was time-intensive
- It served as a good argument for more coordinated data efforts

NVC Booth Activity:

- Jill mentioned the booth on Twitter to drum up interest
- A good number of people, including people who were already using the NVC and VegBank, trickled by, picking up resources

Report on Status of Publications: (Alexa)

- Orié & Alexa shared the list they have been putting together with Ayzik's help
- Updating the list of publications to keep it current has been challenging – it's hard to find the time to do this
- Everyone should send information about their own publications to Alexa
- Ideally, the list of publications would be stored in a searchable database; we would like to have a systematic way to keep track of all the work the Panel is producing
- It may be best to focus on moving forward with the process of documenting publications, rather than delving too far in the past – we need something we can update annually
- Dave has some code that is searchable for keywords
- **Jill will ask ESA's webmaster about adding a searchable page to the Panel website, or possibly a searchable database on the back end**

Annual Report: What We Accomplished Last Year: (Scott)

- We furthered development of the peer review board
- Work has continued on finalizing various levels of the hierarchy, including the Alliances and Groups
- More plots were added to VegBank
- The FAQs are available online now
- Our goal: a complete NVC in the next 18 months or so

Budget Report/Status of 2013 Funds: (Jill/Cliff)

- Jill provided an overview of our budget for the coming year (through summer 2014)
- Paperwork to provide support for Macrogroup work is in progress within USGS and BLM
- ESA and NatureServe are ready to respond and coordinate once these solicitations/RFQs
- The Panel needs to think about a plan of action for the next round of funding – our current USFS agreement expires next summer
- **The Exec Committee should meet by teleconference to begin scoping out a long-term funding agreement and workplan (likely 3 years again)**

Current Business:

Update on the Alliance Work: (Don)

- This project has two phases: to develop Alliance concepts briefly and then to integrate them
- Phase two will start soon – NS staff will begin filling out more detailed descriptions

- We are still waiting to hear from USGS on a possible contract for phase 2
- Peer review process can be difficult to complete when relying on volunteer work; NS is asking all AEs to complete their reviews by the end of August; a few Alliances may be left unreviewed before the next phase begins
- Reviewers seem to like using the myUSGS site; so far it's working well

Overview of the CAPS Grant: (Todd)

- The CA Native Plant Society and the CA State Veg Program applied for a CAPS grant to induct data from the CA system into the NVC;
- A detailed database tracking system is being used – the project team had 7 conference calls and address a different chunk of the classification on each call; they are making a lot of contributions to refining Groups and Macrogroups.
- They expect to complete this in December 2013
- The Group level descriptions from the Southwest were based on ecological systems concepts; so we had to reclassify from the bottom up
- The main product of this is will be a crosswalk between Alliances to NVC groups; comparing state and NVC Alliances is a secondary priority, and amending the alliances would be a longer enterprise

Overview of the USGS Peer Review Project: (Bob)

- Bob gave an overview of the project background and how it came about
- The dataset chosen covers 4 states (longleaf pine) and 31 associations
- The draft proposal splits subxeric G154 into 5 alliances
- The project team needs to write a document about the process they went through so everyone can edit it. We need to address questions like: Exactly what documents do we want to provide reviewers? How do we select reviewers, considering potential conflicts of interest? Do we provide enough data? Is the formatting alright?
- We are looking for reviewers who can think about the local details, in addition to reviewing the process and documents themselves.
- In the Canadian NVC, they conduct physical meetings for peer review and the only agenda item is to evaluating proposals for changes to the classification.
- For the purposes of this project, and possibly for the long term review process for the USNVC, we're planning to evaluate proposals for changes via teleconference.
- The NVC Proceedings should contain the final descriptions, plus the methods and rationale behind any changes that are made; we need to explain how current concepts changed from previous ones, and we need reviewers to let us know if the way we present the changes is adequate and useful as a template.
- We don't know how often people will submit proposals; the database behind the public record may be changing constantly, but we may only refresh the proceedings once per year; software that has version viewing capabilities would help this issue
- We may be able to have notifications to give people a heads-up about upcoming changes
- In general, we need to make the review process as seamless as possible to encourage participation

Update on Groups & Macrogroups: (Don)

- Templates have been set up for the Macrogroups – we still need to decide if we want to use them moving forward
- Some of the Group level work remains unfinished; most are described, but some new Groups were formed during the review process that remain undescribed or blank
- We hope to squeeze in some of the Group work with the Alliance or Macrogroup work
- To tackle the Macrogroups, the general plan is to have the description written by a main author, have each description reviewed, and to hold peer review calls for all MG reviewers within a Division
- Ideally we'd like to have the Alliance and Group work done before this, but that may not be possible – there is a need from BLM to get the Macrogroups complete within the next year

Planning for the Joint Panel and PRB Meeting: (Scott)

- The Panel determined the ideal location would be in the Chapel Hill, NC area
- Dates: January 8, 9, & 10
- **Jill will begin scoping out meeting locations**
- **Marianne will check on space at USFS buildings in the area**

Outreach & Education:

Developing Tutorial Materials: (Todd/Alexa)

- This year we want to tackle the more details information sheets to accompany the FAQs. The following Panel members will help with developing factsheets on the topics below. **Drafts of these factsheets should be available for the January 2014 Panel meeting:**
 - o **Scott:** How the NVC can adapt to changing environments and community composition through time
 - o **Todd & Don:** How the NVC deals with semi-natural vegetation
 - o **Alexa, Marianne, & Carol S.:** How the NVC can cross-walk to other systems
 - o **Alexa & Don,** with help from **Kathy Goodin & Bill Wieland:** How the NVC relates to the coastal marine classification, wetlands, and other standards
 - o Possibly add a mapping-related factsheet here, possibly involving the ILMAG group; Alexa & Chris worked on a draft paper that may help this; it may also be good to involve Dave Tart; **Marianne will ask Harbin about this topic**
- We could start putting crosswalks on the website, but need to decide what systems we want to crosswalk with...

Possible Workshop/Field trip at the National Military Fish and Wildlife Association Meeting: (Todd)

- One recommendation is to tailor two events to different audiences: staff doing field work, and midcareer managers (it sounds like we're leaning towards doing a workshop for field staff)
- **Scott will talk with staff at CEMML to scope out field trip locations and see if they want to partner with the Panel in some way.**
- **Alexa will talk to Heritage staff in CO to scope out field trip locations.**
- There is a lot of uncertainty about the meeting actually happening, due to budget cuts and travel restrictions
- **The Education subcommittee will work on a modular plan and start developing materials for this workshop in stages, while developing a backup plan to use the materials in a different way if the meeting doesn't occur (likely in webinar format)**
- **The Education Subcommittee will have a call in September to move these projects forward, and possibly invite CEMML staff to sit in on a future call.**

Outreach to NEON:

- We need to reach out to them more regarding their veg classification and data collection plans – several Panel members will try speaking with NEON staff at their booth in Minneapolis.

USFS Current Priorities: (Marianne)

- The USFS is interested in showing how they are looking at spatial assets (including vegetation) and being able to manage land spatially, and in taking an “all lands” approach to planning and analyzing landscapes
- Having a common way to categorize assets is important in these approaches – obviously the NVC relates well to this.
- The agency also wants to demonstrate good use of federal dollars, and are focusing on 1) application, deliverables, and science delivery and 2) partnerships with states, NGOs, and other organizations
- The NVC has support within the USFS, but we all need to be able to make the case to congress how important this effort is
- Panel members discussed targeting a webinar for USFS staff and/or other “early adopter” agencies

VEG-DAWG update: (Don)

- Don provided an update on the progress of the Vegetation Plot Databases Working Group (nicknamed VEG-DAWG)
- The idea of collaborating with DataONE in some fashion came up. Possibilities include having VegBank added to their metadata list, becoming a “node,” or mirroring their model of having an annual users group meeting. Alexa & Cliff both have contacts at DataONE.
- For VegBank, we need to determine who has what data and what data structures they have in order to get more data into VegBank. We discussed possible collaboration with the LANDFIRE database.
- The Panel needs more discussion on how to ensure VegBank as a networked database (we discussed possible connections with LANDFIRE, LCCs, and other national efforts), and wants to make supporting VegBank and growing the data a significant priority.

Planning for Future ESA Meetings:

Organizing an OOS (Sacramento, 2014):

- **Todd will begin organizing an OOS, and a possible accompanying field trip, on vegetation mapping and classification for the Sacramento ESA meeting. He will send a description to the Panel and ask Julie Evens to help.**
- In Yellowstone Park they plan to map to the Association level – it might be interested to engage their staff if we do a session on the NVC and mapping

Celebrating the Panel’s 20th Anniversary (Sacramento, 2014):

- We will plan a group dinner after next year’s Panel meeting at ESA to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Veg Panel
- We will invite former members, recognize previous Chairs, and invite previous ESA staff as well
- **Orie, Bob, Don and Scott will scope out the idea of completing a publication to mark the anniversary, possibly for the ESA Bulletin or *Frontiers* (how veg classification is helping us address ecological questions – this could be a possible focus for the paper)**

Organizing a SYMP (Baltimore, 2015):

- We could plan a Symposia on the history of the community of classification, involving European colleagues and possibly urban classification
- The NVC should also be complete at this time, so we could roll out the complete hierarchy