

ESA Panel on Vegetation Classification: Business Meeting Notes

ESA Centennial Meeting: Baltimore, MD

Tuesday, August 11th, 2015; 8:00am-4:30pm

In Attendance:

Alexa McKerrow, Don Faber-Langendoen, Scott Franklin, Jack Triepke, Esteban Muldavin, Dave Roberts, Bob Peet, Chris Lea, Cliff Duke, Jill Parsons, Kim Quach, Marianne Burke, Michael Lee

On the phone:

Julie Evens, Alan Weakley, Pat Comer, Todd Keeler-Wolf

Status Updates:

Society for Range Management (SRM) Workshop: (Alexa)

- Alexa has shared handouts from the workshop & field trip, which went very well. Participants visited 4 different sites that allowed them to look at ecological site descriptions. A local land manager was onsite at each location.
- The next SRM meeting is in Texas, but there are no obvious sites that would be ideal for an NVC-related field trip in conjunction with that meeting.
- During this update, there was some discussion of sampling methodology; we could use CA as a good case study for future articles.
- BLM has asked NatureServe to do a veg handbook, and NatureServe is scoping out this possible effort. **Don will contact Alexa regarding the potential veg handbook.**

Publications: (Alexa/Scott)

- We are looking for people who can help manage and track Panel publications. Previously Orie, Ayzik, and Alexa worked on this.
- Some potential future publications discussed include:
 - o A mapping-related paper (Alexa and Chris).
 - o A paper comparing the ecoveg approach to BBK (Don, Dave R).
 - o Future OOS sessions could present opportunities to pull a paper together as well.
 - o A regular column in the ESA Bulletin describing current Panel efforts.
- **Este and Scott agreed to work together to track and compile Panel publications.**

IAVS Veg Classification Working Group: (Bob/Dave R)

- The working group is still looking for members. **Scott encourages everyone on the Panel join the IAVS Veg Classification working group if possible**, to help encourage publications and further our international collaboration efforts.
- The group is working on a publication that will pull together all the vegetation classification approaches used in different countries.
- The working group has six core tasks:
 - o Get organized as a working group (done).
 - o Increase international networking.
 - o Compare and find commonalities between the most common approaches to vegetation classification.
 - o Discuss concepts and practices of classification approaches aiming to summarize vegetation globally, at coarse ecological resolution.
 - o Discuss concepts and practices of classification approaches aiming to summarize vegetation patterns at fine ecological resolution.
 - o Discuss plot-based analytical procedures for the definition of vegetation types.

Keys: (Don/Scott)

- We need to identify someone to help lead the effort on developing keys to the NVC – from the upper levels down to Divisions (assuming regional keys will be made for lower levels).
- We also need to further discuss what a key would look like, since there are different opinions on this. We could also consider the feasibility of a cell phone app.
- LANDFIRE has already developed some auto keys, which have been tested with plot data.
- Chris is willing to help test keys. It may be helpful to involve Dave Tart in this effort too.

Infrastructure: (Marianne)

- Previously Ralph did an analysis of NVC infrastructure needs, but many internal Forest Service changes have happened since then.
- We have hired a consultant who is trying to help us identify priorities, with a significant focus on VegBank.
- Meanwhile, the Forest Service has few funds due to fire fighting.
- Last week the data management group met. They are trying to establish interdependencies and value to a potential funder and want to harness opportunities.
- Bob suggested we first find a better way to connect with Tina and her team, since conference calls don't seem to be sufficient. Then we need to communicate more with Forest Service leadership.
- Marianne is planning a meeting later in August to move this effort forward, perhaps in North Carolina.
- Marianne also gave a presentation to the Existing Veg Tech Guide Working Group and was encouraged by the response. **Marianne will offer the ESA Panel as a resource to the Existing Veg Tech Guide Working Group if they have any questions** (they meet quarterly).

NVC/Panel Booth Activity:

- We are getting lots of interest!

Panel Budget & USFS/USGS Funding: (Jill/Scott)

- ESA has received the USFS/USGS funding agreement!
- We already need to start thinking about a proposal and budget for next year (the current fiscal year of the agreement will end next June). Ideally we should have something ready this September.
- A supplement for this year is very unlikely, but we want to have something ready, such as restoring the face-to-face Panel meeting, just in case.
- We have around \$5K remaining from the Macrogroup project. Some ideas discussed for this funding include:
 - o Using it to fund travel for Panel members to conduct a briefing at USFS or USGS (potentially involving Bob, Don, and Alexa).
 - o Using it as a reserve for any future funding gaps.
- **Jill will schedule an Exec call in September to move these issues forward, circulating the Year 2 summary and budget that is already drafted.**

Marketing and Communication (with ESA Communications Officer, Liza Lester)

What we want to convey and accomplish for the NVC Full Release:

- Things to highlight:
 - o The uniqueness of the NVC partnership that includes ESA, NatureServe, and federal agencies.
 - o That the Panel and NVC reflect the most collaborative effort of ESA.
 - o The flexibility of the classification, and how that relates to climate change and other applications; the fact that this is a new kind of national standard that is dynamic, yet stable enough to be useful (and all information is archived for historical purposes).

- Communication Goals:
 - o Be descriptive: use imagery whenever possible, and highlight how the NVC is useful to the general public.
 - o Smooth coordination between the communication staff of all partners (Liza, plus communications directors at NatureServe and the Forest Service).
 - o Inject our own personalities into communication materials to show how we are passionate about this; help reporters connect (hopefully attracting venues like Eurekalert and Science Daily).
 - o Find and use good photos (high resolution), ideally with people in them.

Communication Ideas:

- Liza could talk with a land manager, interviewing them about how the NVC is useful and important for them on a daily basis. Some participants from the CA workshop could be ideal for this.
- We could also use the ESA Blog and Tumblr to highlight the release (again, good photos are key).
- We could set up photos and an audio slideshow. Panel members who may be ideal for Liza to interview include Bob and Don.

Key Decisions and Next Steps:

- We will aim to time the full NVC release in **mid-January, 2016**.
- Before the release, we need to have the proceedings available and the fully updated database available online. The target for this is November 2015.
- We will aim to have a piece ready, including a photo gallery with captions, for the January 2016 issue of the ESA Bulletin. Deadline for submission: November 15, 2015.
- We will prepare an ESA press release, including a photo gallery with captions, for January 2016. Ideally this will be complete by the end of November 2015, and can be tweaked at the last minute.
- We can use the ESA homepage to highlight the Bulletin piece and photo gallery.

Peer Review Process Document: (Don/Scott)

Discussion of Peer Review Tools:

- We need to be able to track changes so people can cite them. Ideally the whole classification would be done that way.
- Peer Review Tools: a web form/database system that would automatically fill in would be ideal. Right now the only medium available to submit a proposal is a Word document.
 - o Pdf forms would be useful for managing information, but not useful for exporting quickly.
 - o If users encounter any glitches in a tool, they want to revert back to Word.
 - o Adding a search button on usnvc.org could help.
 - o Any new tool we decide to use needs to be stable and familiar to users. Essentially, it needs to look like Word.
- We don't have funding to develop new tools now, but this could be useful to consider for Year 2.
 - o We need more techy people involved in creating pre populated forms. Alexa would want a sub-group to work on that in the future.

Discussion of Required Fields:

- We previously decided that when proposing types, authors only fill in a small number of required fields that include the essential information a peer reviewer needs to figure out if it's a new type or a change to an existing type.
- Once the proposal goes through the peer review process, the full description needs to be written and accounted for. In many cases proposal authors would need to go back and re-edit those fields. Would this extra step discourage authors?

- Some fields overlap, so asking people to fill them in might be onerous; people simply might not do it.
 - One idea is to have NatureServe staff complete the remaining fields, and then have a final review from the author. But, if this happens, the resulting description would be a hybrid.
 - The non-required fields are needed for the concept description. Ideally the content for these fields could be copied from the full proposal anyway.
 - Is there a way for the database to auto-populate the summary based on the fields entered?
 - Involving the RAEs and the NVC database manager in this process more has budget implications – we would need to pay for their time.
- A possible exercise to help move forward on this issue would be to get someone who is knowledgeable about the NVC (but outside the process) to test the system before we launch it. This may help reveal how onerous (or not) authors would find it to enter the information in the non-required fields after acceptance.

Key Decisions and Action Items:

- We don't want to have the same level of recognition for an expedited proposal as a full proposal (similar to notes vs. research papers in a journal).
- Non-significant edits would be considered maintenance, and not go into the Proceedings.
- The Proceedings database should be able to display when the most recent update was made.
- The author instructions can include how to request documents that separate out certain associations.
- We agree it would be sufficient to list "retired types" on the proceedings website, rather than having them published in the proceedings. Users need to be able to search for these.
 - We could consider having a periodic summary of changes for the classification.
 - It would be helpful to have the ability to type in any cegl code and see its lineage.
- **Don will send the Peer Review Process Document around to the Panel again, incorporating the changes discussed. We hope to have a complete version ready by October 1st.**

VegBank: (Bob/Michael L)

- VegBank was designed to support the NVC. Now its software is antiquated and users find the interface complicated to use.
- There are no resources to develop more user-friendly tools right now. Without a serious software upgrade, VegBank will become obsolete. Many of the tools are no longer supported by the vendor.
- In short, we want to improve the usability of VegBank and its connection to various partners, and have it be better linked with the NVC database. There are many plots not getting into VegBank because users find it difficult, and/or because VegBank isn't equipped to handle large uploads.
- We want more people to have an incentive to use VegBank, and to make it more useful and indispensable to a larger audience. For example, if VegBank could display and highlight partners' data, it would be very useful to some groups.
- There is a VegBank Strategic Planning meeting scheduled for August 12th in Baltimore at the ESA meeting.
- **Bob will keep the Panel and ESA informed of outcomes from the VegBank meeting.**

NVC Proceedings Website:

- Tom Allnutt gave a presentation and demonstration of a prototype of the NVC Proceedings website.
- Panel members suggested changing the look of the homepage so that it looks more like a journal website homepage.

- **Jill will try to research how the new ESA journals page will look, and keep the Panel updated.**
- **Exec will discuss the look of the proceedings website on a future call.**
- On the website (table view), we should be able to view two different kinds of articles (expedited vs. full proposals); it would be nice to include additional authors too; we don't need to see the DOI here, but just need to be able to find it.
- A table of contents for pdf files would be helpful.
- We plan to use Vol # . Article #. Date. for full proposals and Vol #. Letter #. Date. for expedited proposals.

Supplemental Proposal Ideas/Future Projects: (Scott, Don)

Preparing Caribbean/Alaska/Hawaii Content for the NVC:

- For the Caribbean, the Forest Service is a natural partner. This work is probably the most vital.
 - Tamara Hartsill of the Caribbean Foresters Network in Puerto Rico (Forest Service) could be a good contact.
 - Eileen Helmer (Forest Service) is a former Panel member and another good contact. Though it is unlikely she could lead anything due to time constraints, she may have good suggestions for someone who could.
 - One approach would be to target the Group level first, and then drill down to other levels.
 - Though Janet cannot lead this effort, she can help with creating a strategy for developing the Caribbean classification.
 - **Janet, Pat, Todd, and Don will help identify a leader for this effort and scope out the amount of time and work involved.**
- Don has some funding to seek out partners for the Alaska work; Alaska Heritage did get one of the regional grants.

Formalizing NVC State Partners:

- The Panel agrees that we should move forward to formally establishing state partners and build stronger communication with these partners.
- **Don and Scott will develop a plan to take this forward.**
- RAEs could have a call to discuss this further.

Face-to-Face Panel and PRB Meeting:

- Dave Roberts will pursue this idea if funding becomes available.
- **Jill will send Dave the relevant sections from our proposal that include a possible face-to-face meeting budget.**

Workshops for Government Agencies:

- Potential workshop venues discussed include:
 - FIA Meeting: looking at 2016 meeting (December 2015 meeting deadlines have passed already).
 - SAF (Society of American Foresters): Madison, Wisconsin; November 2-6, 2016.

Panel Website: (Kim, Jill)

- **The Outreach Subcommittee will help review the website and develop content to prepare for the NVC full release in January 2016.**
 - We want to make the site more visual, but need high quality, high resolution photos to do that.
 - We want to ensure the site's layout is mobile friendly.

- We need engaging content, and hopefully occasional news stories on current Panel efforts.
- **Este** agreed to help with communication efforts on the Outreach Subcommittee. He also suggested using Panel meeting/call highlights as news items on the website.
- Any special publications or reports that we highlight on the website could also be distributed to heritage networks and the ESA Veg Section.
- **Kim** will look into adding a “join our mailing list” button to the homepage.
- As we formalize state partners, we can add their contact details on the website too.
- We need to carefully avoid duplication of content between the Panel website and the USNVC website.

Panel History Timeline:

- Scott needs help filling in the gaps of this timeline, including important Panel publications.
- **Scott** will circulate the timeline to the Panel for feedback.
- **Bob** and **Don** agreed to help complete the timeline.
- **Kim** will turn the completed timeline into a list and investigate how to display it on the Panel website.

International Collaborations:

- Don gave an overview of current collaboration efforts with the CNVC (Canadian NVC), outlined the need and possibility to coordinate more with Mexico, and gave an overview of current IVC efforts/progress made.
- The main goals in this collaborative effort are to reach out to international colleagues to weigh in on coordinating language, to ensure the NVC fits well into other international classification efforts and the IVC, and to keep the USNVC strong.
- **Regarding collaborations with Mexico, Todd, Pat and Exequiel could potentially work with them to develop Macrogroups and Associations.** Those who attended the IAVS field trip in Baja could also be good collaborators.

Planning Panel Activities for ESA 2016:

- We plan to have the NVC/Panel booth set up again.
- Sessions that highlight NVC applications may get a bigger audience at ESA meetings.
- Some SYMP ideas discussed include:
 - Bioinformatics and general classification interaction
 - How the NVC is being used and applied to conservation goals; showcase some of the work being done on NVC and how it’s being applied.
 - VegBank: showcase people who have used Vegbank data to tell big stories (scaling up).
- Some Workshop/Field Trip ideas discussed include:
 - Developing the Caribbean classification: **Don will talk to Todd, Pat, and Exequiel to scope out possible Caribbean workshop ideas.**
 - Local state mapping efforts could be good connections for a field trip.
 - Urban forestry in Gainesville (may be too far away from Ft. Lauderdale).
 - Workshop on Longleaf Pine – Susan Carr might be interested.
- **Chris will follow up with Michelle Horton at ESA on why the Wednesday field trip was cancelled this year.**
- The deadlines to submit proposals are listed below:
 - SYMP/OOS/OPS Proposals Due: **September 17th**
 - IGN/SS/FT/WS Proposals Due: **November 19th**