

# ESA Panel on Vegetation Classification

## Meeting Notes: August 13, 2019

### Louisville, KY

In attendance: Este Muldavin Don Faber Langendoen, Bob Peet, Todd Keeler-Wolf, Jack Triepke, Alexa Mckerrow, Julie Evens, Catherine O’Riordan, Jill Parsons, Scott Franklin,

Remotely: Chelsea Fowler, Carol Spurrier, Tom Wentworth, Dave Roberts

#### **Budget and FGDC Updates:**

##### Budget update:

- 2020 Panel meeting: February; potentially in Phoenix??
- We will need to make good, effective use of the travel funds we have available, and possibly prioritize Panel and RE meetings in the next budget year.
- We might be able to fund two Panel communication internships.

##### FGDC Update:

- Carol submitted language from MOU to USFS office.
- Reviewed charter, submitted to FGDC Veg Subcommittee for their review; discussed FACA rule for voting (non-fed partners should not be guiding financial decisions); that language will stay in there; we vote by consensus, mostly on non-financial matters about policy and standard issues; if no consensus, it goes to FGDC.
- Wildlife Society Meeting: good progress is being made on the October field trip/workshop planned for this meeting; ESA will pay for travel, lunches, and water for the field trip (20 people) travel for Todd and Pat.
- Communications plan: Karl said he wanted a briefing paper, Alexa re-sent the briefing we previously provided to him and NPS communications staff prior to the May meeting, and Carol will add some additional information and resend to him by the end of this week.

##### Bylaws update:

- Bylaws enumerate governance operations not procedures
- **Chelsea will circulate the bylaws for feedback with notes from this meeting, then Exec will organize the comments and circulate the final recommended changes to the Panel.**
- The Panel will then vote on the recommended changes 30 days later.

#### **Peer Review Board Updates:**

##### 5-year Plan to Improve the Alliance Level:

- The Panel completed quick screening of the Alliance level previously. We want to revisit this level of the hierarchy and improve it because it is a very important level in the NVC – agencies need to be able to use it as the most operational lowest level.
- The 5-year timeline makes the plan practical because the REs and AEs are volunteers. Additional funding could accelerate the process, as could additional tools. Tools and templates designed by the NVC data managers will help!

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- Macrogroup level and up only changes every 5 years. Over this 5 year plan, changes could percolate up, but we could accumulate those changes and wait to implement those changes until after the 5 years.
- Narrative descriptions should be improved for every Alliance during this process.
- Options to handle this work include:
  - Google docs (though concerns exist re: losing edits); Michael Lee knows Google Docs well though, and could potentially guide us
  - Emailing word documents
  - Using a wiki space
  - Using the Scholastica Peer Review Tool
- Don reviewed the workplan for the 5-year Alliance review.
  - The first step is for the EIC to work with REs to map out their own workplans for conducting reviews in their regions, identify AEs to help, and identify colleagues and partners who may be interested.
  - We also need to consider the need for regional RE meetings in advance and think about how to conduct them in cost effective ways.
  - We also want to align this work with any datasets that are available.
- **Goal:** to have a full operational plan by Panel meeting next August (2020).
- Next potential RE meetings: Northern Great Plains in Fall 2020; then Appalachian (MD/VA/NC) meeting potentially via webinar. The goal is to have REs set these meetings; the EIC may not need to be at all these meetings.
- We can use the workplan to help get people engaged in the NVC Review Board and in the review process in general.

#### Peer Review Tool Update:

- We have decided to use Scholastica for the USNVC peer review tool.
- The tool is not currently active – we hope to make it live later this Fall (October).
- **Jill will work with Scholastica staff to schedule a training in the peer review tool in late Sept or early Oct and invite all Panel members and REs. The training will be recorded and posted.**

#### **Data Management**

##### VegBank Updates:

- The VegBank security assessment is underway. Jill will ask NCEAS/Matt Jones for an update.
- The Panel began to open up the conversation beyond sustaining and revamping VegBank, to how we interact with a bigger initiative on collecting and archiving veg plot data nationally and internationally. A partnership could be attractive to NSF; it would tie in to data sharing, coordination, and openness themes that are receiving more attention and traction, and let us articulate how our veg plot data efforts overlap or dovetail with what is going on internationally. In short, we need to get out of the business of being a veg plot data archive, because we can't afford it. *Our main priority is findability of data and relating the data to NVC codes.*
- **Goal:** Identify a veg scientist and data management leader.

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### Louisville, KY

- Key questions:
  - Should we work towards an international global solution?
  - Should we still consider modernizing VegBank using R as the user interface?
  - We need to revisit the template we've developed to ensure it's compatible with other groups.
- Possible Partners or collaborators:
  - GBIF:
    - Abby Benson – USA node for GBIF – the idea of linking to international repository is appealing; they are working on “events theme” – repeat sampling events at a place – IPT toolkit to get data into GBIF; Abby is also linked to OBIS
    - Conversation with GBIF is worth pursuing; they have expanded to include the Standard; the goal is to have data shared through GBIF, not managed there.; they would flag data and make data available from a variety of sources; a more dynamic repository
  - BIEN
    - They also do data cleaning
    - Talk to Brian Enquist at Univ of Arizona – lead of BIEN project – he may have suggestions for people we should reach out to to lead our efforts.
  - DataONE:
  - Environmental Data Initiative
  - NEON
  - LTERs
  - Agencies (e.g. within USGS talk to Mike Frame - Alexa's boss's boss)
- Next steps:
  - Write a white paper detailing possible plans and partners; consider including a list of who collects plot data and how and where they store/archive it; and the capabilities of where that data is stored (is it searchable? Can users interact or download it?)
  - Identify a leader to take the effort forward.
  - Identify leaders at partner/collaborator institutions
  - Ensure veg plot template is 100% finalized and reflects the data we want to share; identify our priorities
  - **Charge data working group with leading next steps: Michael Lee, Don, Alexa, Bob, Matt Jones, Dave Tart Este, Dave R**

#### Webpage Updates:

Usnvc.org:

- Alexa is implementing Este's suggestions to the website
- New content has been incorporated into the search (2.03)
- Plan to build in state crosswalks; we need shorter names; Alexa will be focusing on that more later this summer.

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- Do we have the capability to add photos when people browse the classification? Everyone can send photos to Alexa as a start.

#### Proceedings:

- We will change the author instructions to be in pdf format
- **Don will update author instructions in early September**
- **Jill will upload new author instructions in pdf format after Don updates them.**

#### Veg Panel website:

- Databases and tools page:
  - Link to NS explorer on Veg Panel page higher up ; make NS explorer easier to get to and explain why you want to find/use it. Explorer is way to get to international veg classification.
  - USDA plants: explain why we link to USDA plants: naming/taxonomy
- **Alexa and Todd will send Jill photos from the field trip and write a brief text summary of the trip for Chelsea to post on the website.**
- Change “contact” to “get involved” and make content more compelling; convey how it benefits you to get involved

#### NVC Archiving:

- History of Panel
  - Bob has digitized a lot of his files and gave Scott access to a DropBox that he created; he plans to organize the files soon.
  - Digital files are preferred to hard copies in terms of archiving.
- NVC archiving:
  - Put a link on usnvc.org once a year so you can see what updates were done annually
  - You can also request updates from NVC data manager
  - Ideally we can post all the archive codes so users can look them up

#### **Education and Outreach**

Pat has agreed to be the lead for the Education & Outreach Committee going forward. **Goals** include reaching more people and new audiences and communicating the value of the USNVC.

#### Future Webinars:

- Veg plot data standards webinar?
- Reach out to society for ecological restoration?
- Implement webinar evaluations to capture suggestions and monitor impact

#### Other communication activities:

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- GreenInfo contractors: we could consider using their help (Alexa is the contact)
- Revisit State Partners Survey
- More tracking of who is using the USNVC and how they are using it??
- NatureServe could create and maintain a list of people to notify NVC users of updates

#### Engaging younger/other audiences in vegetation science and classification:

- There need to be jobs behind it!
- Distill the last two webinars – convey cost saving measures of NVC (Todd)
- “where are you working? Let’s put your site in context.”
- Consider cycling regular news items
- Key audiences to connect with:
  - LTER PIs
  - NEON
  - OBFS
- Encourage scientists to involve their grad students

#### Other upcoming meetings?

- Tack on outreach activity to RE meetings??
- Society of American Foresters? – focus would likely be on modernizing, crosswalkng
- Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies + SE and NE versions (Park City Utah July 9-14, 2020)
- Society of Range Management – call for papers out now – Denver, Feb (Oct 15 for abstract deadlines) Scott and Pat could submit a talk

#### Nomenclature:

- Goal of committee: Revise nomenclature guide to help standardize terms for scientific and common names with an emphasis on a consistent list and definition for the physiognomic terms used to describe those types
  - Decided to defer colloquial terms for now
  - Create consistent descriptions for each term used in the NVC
- Background: e.g. existing veg technical guide – captures lots of terminology, but terminology is inconsistent
  - Bruce Hoagland may be willing to help
  - Physiognomic terms are the most problematic
- Next steps:
  - Incorporate feedback from Panel meeting
  - More discussion on ecosystem and abiotic terms
  - New query from Michael?
  - Checklist for consistency
  - ID tasks
  - Update guide

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- Feedback:
  - Provisional terms have more license to use abiotic terms
  - Physiognomic/abiotic/ - we would want to use them as adjectives; an environmental term is an adjective, but a physiognomic term is a noun
    - It's a descriptor - it's a trivial type of wordsmithing that will correct itself
  - Committee goal: should also include geographic terms
    - this is important for mapping community
    - other terms are higher priority, but geographic terms are also an "easy grab"
- Officially set this up as a standing veg panel committee – approved.

#### ESA 2020 Activities:

- SYMP proposal – change to an OOS proposal
  - Future of veg classification
  - #1: cut this talk
  - #2: mapping; LANDFIRE national map – where is mapping taking us? Put classification and mapping together
  - #3: yes
  - #4: yes - Data mgt and archiving
  - #5: classification, conservation, and ecosystem red-listing? This could also be put in a poster; OR novel systems; Don can help with that
  - #6: NO - Bob might not be able to do; the challenges of mapping & veg classification
  - Consider recruiting a student/early career scientist as an author/co-author on one of the presentations
  - Name ideas:
    - Cataloguing ecosystem diversity in the Anthropocene
    - Classification for your conservation, and applications forecasting
    - Conserving Vegetation Diversity in the Anthropocene
    - Possible inventory focus?? Mapping our Assets – as we lose resources to development, we lose valuable assets (
    - Tracking our Changing Ecosystem Assets
- **Scott will revise the proposal and send to the Panel by end of August;**
- **Chelsea will send poll for Panel call week of Sept 3rd**
- Field trip
  - Management and conservation focus??
  - Discuss on a future panel call
  - Someone should create an idea – **Dave Tart could put something together and we can review on the next Panel Call**

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Paying Panel members to attend 2020 ESA meeting?

- Need to investigate why we stopped doing this and provide Panel members with an answer

How to engage students in what we do?

- Let students know about Veg Section travel awards to come to ESA meetings
- Recruit younger AEs

Scott will attend Veg Section mixer and connect with Kyle and current section chair