

## PRB and ESA Panel Meeting Summary

The following summary is not intended as formal minutes per se, but a record of major decisions, with some commentary. See attached files for additional notes taken during the discussion of the first two days by the Panel Review Board.

### AEs and Panel Members Expressed all Group-Level Issues

Current NVC is somewhat US-centric, but collaborations continue with Canadians, and less so with Mexicans.

At what level do we change from physiognomic to floristic?

Use of diagnostic species should be at Group level? MG? neither?....

Ambiguity of transition zones

Scale and resolution is not clear for G or MG (mapable?)

Users may need different guidance than what classifiers need.

### CRITERIA FOR MACROGROUP AND GROUP

**Overview:** There was extensive discussion on the criteria for Groups and Macrogroups (and later Divisions and alliances). Overall there was a sense that interpretive guidelines and technical guidance for these levels was not yet clear enough. The PRB and the Panel spent several rounds suggesting possible changes and worked through a case study (Red Spruce-Fir). A revised set of criteria will be drafted, assessed through case studies, and a “final” version created by May.

#### **Decision:**

- a. To redraft the criteria table from Division to Association, based on the direction of the discussion at the meeting, and create both a summary table version and a detailed table version. (Don/Scott) (ASAP)
- b. **Develop case studies** and use new tables to work through case studies– Este (warm deserts), John/Ayzik (California forests), chris/bob/alan (Southeast warm temperate forests), Del? (pacific coastal forests? (Canadian Boreal forests??) March 1, reviewed by AEs??

#### **Discussion Notes from AEs:**

There is a lack of clarity of Group and Macrogroup definitions in the documentation. Panel needs to improve criteria for determining splits of G and MG.

Reviewers need a more holistic view of the level they are looking at. They were given only a small subset and not where that subset 'fit' into the larger hierarchy. The AEs and Panel members suggested that the current optional field of 'Similar NVC types' should be mandatory.

Panel members agreed split (Group of MG) should be based on both a bottom-up and top-down understanding in addition to within level comparison.

We may need 'staged' rules for review; expectations of quality and quantity to build USNVC are likely much less than expectations for changing USNVC based on proposals.

The naming convention was too restrictive: e.g., three species at MG level, etc. AEs discussed how representative names needed to be?

There is a pretty clear idea of upper levels and a clear idea of alliance and assoc.; however, middle levels are still fuzzy; AEs suggested some flexibility is needed to create a usable classification

Need to develop a rule set (criteria) that will carry us forward - have to have guidelines that are subject to interpretation – this seems a major action point for Panel and is being carried forth through the document that Don, Alan, and Scott developed at the meeting and was discussed Friday morning.

Update and clarify the criteria document (see below)

[See attached "Table of Criteria"]

Thus PRB was not ready for accepting all Group and MG concepts at the present time. However, some of the above issues were more clarified. See next section for proposed process for Macrogroup and Division level review.

### **Macrogroup and Divisions Level Review (L5-L6)**

Divisions, Macrogroups, and Groups came out of 3 large working group meetings (Boulder – western U.S., Durham – eastern U.S., WebEx – Great Plains) with subsequent refinement by NatureServe staff while working up the Group descriptions. Associate Editors for the ESA Peer Review Board (PRB) BAs Group reviews were assigned at the MG level. So now we have the opportunity to conduct a relatively quick review of the MG (and Division) levels based on the AE experience in handling all Groups across the MGs. Did the MGs make sense? Are there any improvements we could make?

#### **NEED FOR INTERIM MACROGROUP AND DIVISION REVIEW**

The ESA Panel proposed the following:

1. AEs should complete their Group reviews between **Feb. 29 and March 31**, working through the sharepoint site (see details on Group review process below).
2. AEs should sent in any review comments on their MGs by **March 31**, using a simple Word document that has MG #, MG name, and Comment.

3. NVC data management team will requested changes to the Groups and Macrogroups into the master USNVC spreadsheet, and send these out to the ESA Panel and PRB, and NatureServe authors by **April 15**.
4. ESA PRB, working with NatureServe authors and CNVC Technical Committee, will work along regional structures to determine whether MG and Group concepts are consistent across regions and agree on needed changes to the MG and Division levels. **Use WebEx approach.** [Note, changes to the Group level do not typically need to be resolved, as these will be handled by peer review discussions between individual AEs and NatureServe authors. Final decisions on Macrogroups and Divisions to be completed by **May 15**.
5. Agreement on MG level distinctions will greatly facilitate completion of Group level edits.

## **GOING FORWARD**

Macro group and Division review could be handled primarily by Peer Review Board itself (working through regional AE structure?), inviting additional peer review as needed. We would like to develop additional teams for Central American, Caribbean, and South American regions for NVCs and IVC. Ecosystem Red List project may help here.

## **Process for Continued Group-Level Review**

The Panel agreed that decisions on the above must be made/clarified; a criteria document is being updated and will be available soon.

The Panel discussed the proposed process to continue the Group review; this included new dates and additional steps; The Panel agreed on the proposed process; the process includes the development of case studies and the use of the updated criteria document to work through – Este, John/Ayzik, chris/bob/alan, Del? – March 1, reviewed by AEs

As per the tool to use for continuing the review, Sharepoint will be used to a limited extent; AEs are to submit their reviews directly to the author of the Group concept, but descriptions with revisions should also be on the Sharepoint site.

The Panel decided that conflicting decisions of AE and author should be resolved through a congenial phone call between the AE and author with a moderator (another AE).

The Panel agreed to create placeholders for Groups that are not well-defined, rather than accept a poor description

The Panel agreed that proposed changes to MGs from the review process should be through a different document; there is no specific format for this document

The timeline and process for this review is as follows:

### **Plan to complete current Group Review:**

The ESA Panel proposed the following:

1. AEs should complete their Group reviews between **Feb. 29 and March 31**. They will send their AE forms directly to the NatureServe staff, which is how NatureServe staff will be alerted that their Groups have been reviewed. Actual Group descriptions are maintained on the sharepoint site.
2. Group descriptions will be edited through the sharepoint site:
  - a. Wherever possible, all direct edits to the Group description from peer review will have been completed on the Sharepoint site, so NatureServe writers can work from the sharepoint site to make edits.
  - b. There may be cases where two reviewers each provided detailed comments to the AE as Word documents, and it will be easier for the AE to send the NatureServe authors the individual Group descriptions as Word Documents. In that case, the NatureServe writer can decide which is the primary doc, replace the one on the sharepoint site with it, then complete other edits.
3. NatureServe staff should review the AE comments, work out an agreed process for making the edits (**March 1 ff, ending June 30**), and resubmit. Resubmission should include a list of all associations assigned to the Group (using a master U.S. list of Groups and associations, with filters).
  - a. If they agree, they should tell the AE so, and proceed to make edits, briefly noting how they responded to requested changes, and resubmit.
  - b. If they do not agree, then they should explain why not and send back the explanation to the AE. Note, in various cases, the AEs themselves may not be sure of the right direction for fixing Groups, and are looking for writer input.
  - c. If, after the AE receives NatureServe writer input, they disagree with the writers' response, they will invite a second AE to facilitate their discussion with the writer and come to a mutual consensus.
  - d. If Group descriptions require an overhaul and there is no opportunity to redraft them, consider how best to handle this (e.g. reduce description to brief concept statement).
4. AEs review final submitted Group edits, approve them and send them on the Editor-in-Chief (EIC) for final approval. (**latest by July 15**)
5. EIC approves (reviewing any issues with AE), then sends them on to the NVC data management team (**latest by July 30**).
6. Data management team makes requested changes to Biotics records. (**March 15 ff ending September??**).

**Going forward:**

The Panel recommends that AE responsibility be assigned at the Group (rather than MG) level. See additional notes below "Interim Review Process Association & Group"

## Financing Group Edits

Funding is needed for NatureServe staff to implement all changes to Group types and descriptions, based on peer review. But until we summarize the edits requested by AEs for all Groups it is hard to estimate the cost. We will have a clearer idea at the end of March when all AE review comments are submitted to NatureServe Group authors.

## Propose How to Proceed with Alliances

The Panel agreed that the screening was encouraging since ~70% of Alliances 'fit' into one Group; thus, the Group concept is not completely broke

AEs agreed with Don's 2-phase proposal for the Alliance review process:

### PHASE 1 (skeletal). ALLIANCE CONCEPT REVIEW

1. Determine how many alliances "cross" groups or macrogroups (i.e., they really are "more broke"). (this will be based on updated Spring 2011 Group concepts and association assignments)
2. Assess what it takes to fix these "more broke" alliances.
3. Assess what it takes to fix the "less broke" alliances.
4. Double check association assignments.
5. Double check Group descriptions.
6. Double check Systems relationships to Groups and alliances.

### PHASE 1 EVALUATION:

1. All proposed alliance concepts will be sent to the ESA Peer Review Board (NVC Group Associate Editors) for their evaluation. The concepts will be sent in a spreadsheet that includes the Group, proposed alliance concept, and component associations.
2. ESA Peer Review Board will evaluate and suggest revisions, as needed.
3. NatureServe staff will respond to suggested edits and work with AEs to resolve issues.
4. ESA Panel and NatureServe will assess criteria used in the Screening Database Tool, and revise as needed for application to alliances.

### PHASE 2 (beef). ALLIANCE DESCRIPTION REVISIONS

1. Rewrite the alliance descriptions based on proposed and approved skeletal alliance concepts.
2. Upload alliance descriptions into NVC database, and transfer information to Screening Database.
3. Screen alliances using revised Screening Database Tool.
4. Database support tools (?).
5. Generate Alliance Reports and make available for long term peer review.

**Funding: NatureServe will seek funding to implement the alliance screening process outlined above.**

Review Process for L1-L3:

The Panel agreed to an updated review process and schedule:

- Recommended changes to L1-L3 will be made by March 31<sup>st</sup>
- The Panel will have until April 30<sup>th</sup> to review/approve these changes

General agreement of the Panel pending revisions and panel view of final doc

The Panel recognizes the potential contributions of INTL colleagues and the potential development of an INTL team; already one being implemented through IAVS

Bob will work with the IAVS classification subcommittee on drafting an article for publication that provides an overview of international classification systems and compares/contrasts them – with an aim to promote more international collaboration.

General agreement that the current set of L1 – L3 units are satisfactory and we should adopt them, pending revisions based on a number of suggested edits (See list below “Suggested Edits to L1-L3) and panel view of final list.

Todd will draft a proposal on some L1-L3 changes he recommends and send it to Don, for the HRWG to consider.

**MMSC:** To accept the top 3 levels of the NVC (types and descriptions) developed by the HRWG, provided that the Panel receives feedback on how any proposed changes (recommended by Panel members and international partners) were handled; any changes must be accepted by a majority vote of the Panel.

The Panel recommends that the top 3 levels of the NVC be fixed for a minimum of 5-years (and up to 10 yrs), after which a reassessment can be made. The goal is to provide stability to users. See also recommendations for Divisions and Macrogroups below. Scott and Don will feed this information back to the FGDC Veg Subcommittee.

In the meantime, the ESA Panel is open to exploring options for establishing an international team of ecologists who might give input on the upper levels.

Suggested Edits to L1-L3, for HRWG (based in part on review of website edits).

1. Consider merging class 7 (Agricultural) and 8 (Developed Vegetation) into an “Anthromorphic Class.” (international review comment). Avoids requiring something of a “land use” distinction at the highest level.
2. Chris – freshwater aquatic, and saltwater aquatic – split into Temperate versus Tropical based on seasonal biomass of the temperate versus aseasonal biomass of the tropics (and biogeography of genera of seagrass also follow this distinction).
3. Chris – Boreal Forest formation– consider whether it should be renamed to “Boreal & High Montane Forest Formation” or “Boreal & Subalpine Forest Formation” and move the temperate subalpine spruce-firs under that formation (see also Brown et al. 1998). This would move Engelmann Spruce – Fir – Lodgepole etc in the West and Red Spruce-Fir in the east under this revised formation. Current approach is to create “boreal subalpine forest MGs” within Boreal

Formation, “temperate subalpine forest MGs” within the temperate, and “Tropical High Montane Forest MGs” within the tropical Montane formation, following ecoregional and biogeographic patterns of the vegetation.

4. Warm temperate vs Mediterranean forests. Spanish ecologists would like clarification on how we handle Mediterranean forests. We need to explain that warm temperate forests include Mediterranean forests, whereas we distinguish the Mediterranean scrub
5. Possible Arctic Edits from Alaskan review (do we need Wet Tundra as a formation?).
6. Possible Alpine edits (6.D.2?). (do we need 6.D.2.)
7. Rock Vegetation - edit the formation name to say “& other rock...?”. Clarify the scree (unconsolidated) versus talus, cliff (consolidated) patterns
8. Descriptions need a final tune-up.

## Develop Interim Review Process for Assoc & Group (prior to when long-term infrastructure is in place)

Decided to have AEs for each group; all AEs present were willing to continue to serve, but we need to recruit more. E.g., NatureServe, Heritage Program, other partner ecologists may now become Associate Editors of specific Groups.

For now, AEs will work from the group level on down (so they will be responsible for overseeing future reviews for associations/alliances). Some AEs may want to consider giving some groups away to colleagues if the workload gets to be too much.

There should be a Regional AE coordinators who will coordinate decisions that AEs cannot make on their own, oversee reviews in an entire region, and also recruit AEs as needed on their region– suggested names (John Sawyer [surfers], Ken Baldwin [moose country], Eileen Helmer [beach country], maybe Bruce Hoagland [sea of grass], civil war area TBD)

The Panel agreed to the proposal of Kristin Snow regarding significant edits (see attached). Associate Editors would work with NVC data managers (DM) to handle edits, divided into three types:

1. Technical Edits – DM makes them, without AE needing to review.
2. Non-significant edits in significant fields (AE reviews).
3. Significant edits, potentially affecting type concept (AE reviews, may conduct additional peer review).

See Sig edits Word documents from NVC DMG.

Panel decided that a refresh of the official classification would occur annually with edits occurring regularly; the edited document would be available digitally upon request. Thus, we would plan for

refresh of official descriptions of associations and groups (and alliances when available) annually, but keep a background database etc current as edits are made. We need more information from the DMG on how this would work.

## **Develop Long-term Review Process to Change Association/Alliance/Group**

Bob outlined several difficulties when the NVC descriptions are not ‘tied’ to reports and publications of classifications. He presented a case study of Piedmont floodplain forest types (demonstrating an example of an analytical, plot based approach to describing associations), and outlined several difficulties when quantitative data results are used to examine the NVC descriptions, which are not ‘tied’ to data, reports and publications of classifications. He also highlighted the need for better guidance on who is allowed to make edits to type concepts.

Need a process that is fair and transparent; captures new studies to incorporate them even though studies may only be a part of a concept’s range.

Panel agreed that there must have a historical coding of concepts at all levels.

For any proposals to change the USNVC, the Panel agreed there is an expectation of data or new/missed publications behind proposals (substantial and unequivocal evidence for the change, but could be either descriptive or plot-based); need a method for reconciling author and AE differences

Panel members discussed the Proceedings as a component of the long-term review process; several ideas were suggested: how is this journal different than other ESA journals (specific to classification: would contain proposed changes and a ‘comments’ section)? Is a template version of a proposal needed? Need a software interface to link Proceedings with USNVC database? What should it look like (lots of pics and tables)? Need a professional copy editor, but who would pay (agreed a subscription cost or author cost is not appropriate)? Perhaps need a marketable idea of a journal that would make for a good endowment....

## **Education & Outreach**

### **CO MIDCAREER MANAGERS WORKSHOP**

Todd received the following input based on the current workshop draft agenda:

- Leave “agency mandates” out of the agenda; refer to agency “business needs” instead
- Todd should talk to people at Jornada – though they are developers and don’t need to attend the workshop itself, Todd should connect with them beforehand (Brandon - Este’s contact, Joel Brown, Jeff Herrick)
- The NVC’s relationship to ESD is a sensitive topic – Todd and Alexa are talking to Gene Fults about this
- Joel and Brian from Landfite workshop – could also be people to contact before the workshop happens



- Keith and Pat will send Todd and Alexa some names (Homer Sanchez came up) for people to talk to re: ESD
- Amend the agenda – start at 8:00am so there’s more time; scrap the NVC history; focus on what the NVC is now, where to get info, and what tools are available instead.
- In the original 10-10:50 slot, structure the discussion in breakout groups and reportbacks (assign groups ahead of time, so people are in groups with different agencies) – extend time for this to 90 mins
- Chris may be able to help with NPS materials
- At the workshop, ask attendees what training/outreach materials would be useful to have in the future, and use their recommendations to shape the Panel’s outreach products
- Eileen suggested some names: Mike B(?), Paula Formwell, Claudia Regan, Kate Dwyer

#### **ESA MEETING ACTIVITIES: SYMPOSIUM**

- Though the papers that will be presented don’t necessarily focus on the NVC, Scott and Orie can remind attendees of the NVC as they moderate
- We may want to look into developing a paper out of the symposium – possibly submitting to Ecosphere
- Jill will ask at ESA about podcasting

#### **ESA MEETING ACTIVITIES: BOOTH**

- Jill will look at the cost/ability to have a banner made for the booth this year
- Paying for internet access at the booth is likely not worth what it would cost.

### **New Panel Website**

Jill received the following input on the draft new panel website:

- Make the sub-tabs visible somehow (so you can see how the site is structured better)
- Add a page for publications
- Enable hovering descriptions of photos with association names
- Look at adding a gallery page or links to a Panel Flickr (or similar) site – so Panel members can upload photos and link them to the relevant descriptions somehow
- Need to add logos to the acknowledgements section
- Need a new tagline : “into the weeds” “vegetation rocks” – Ken’s ideas ☺
- Possibly shrink the size of the header photo
- Add materials from the webinars somehow – possibly just pdfs of the slides, but can also look into adding links to webinars on youtube, or using powerpoint with voiceover software (ask Michael for info on this)
- Aiming to have the new site active before the march 20<sup>th</sup> workshop

### **New Business**

A publications subcommittee was created based on the suggestion by Orie. Orie and Ayzik will make up the committee with the charge to develop and direct publications of the Panel.

## Future Issues that Need to be Addressed

The concept of Ruderal was not discussed

The concept of Sub-associations was not discussed

The idea to merge Ag and Dev into a single class was not fully discussed. HRWG will review this option and come back to the Panel with a proposal.

## Financing Overall NVC work

Jill and Cliff gave an overview of the Panel's Year 2 budget:

- Our overall funding for this year was cut from almost \$150K to around \$103K
- We've reduced the scope of our training and outreach plans – so now we are only doing one workshop at a smaller scale
- We combined the PRB and Panel meetings, and have significant savings (exact amount TBD) from holding the meeting in CO rather than DC
- We have enough funding to cover staff time, VegBank Maintenance, EIC Subcontract funds, and modest honoraria/travel for the midcareer workshop in Denver
- There is no funding to cover Panel member travel to FGDC meetings or to the ESA Portland meeting

General discussion:

- Year 3 funding will likely be delayed; Cliff and Jill will have a better idea in April of how much may be left in the Year 2 budget to tide us over
- The current agreement can be modified – we can submit revised plans for Year 3 for FS approval, if we determine some Panel activities are more important to fund than others
- Scott will oversee a draft of Panel funding priorities, and work with Exec to create this; Bob will help craft a long-range plan for VegBank as well. Some initial priorities discussed were:
  - o Peer review tool
  - o Alliance level review – will be slow without more funding
  - o MG and Division review
  - o Workshops and outreach – do more cost effective things – more webinars, - maybe less of a priority – get things set up first
  - o Maintaining VegBank

## OTHER NOTES

### Canadian NVC Presentation.

Ken Baldwin summarized the CNVC process for developing associations, and introduced some of their discussion on mid-level units. [powerpoint available?]