

Notes from the March 20th NVC Midcareer Managers Workshop

Denver Federal Center

Participants:

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Tim Bottomley	Alexa McKerrow	Jeff Connor
Matt Bobo	JoAnn Dulum	Jill Parsons
Paul Block	Curtis Talbot	
Barbara Wolf	Craig Busckhol	<u>On WebEx:</u>
Mark Miller	Rachel Murph	Carol Spurrier
Jay Benner	Christine Bishop	Harbin Li
Scott Franklin	Megan Bowes	Leona Svancara
Todd Keeler-Wolf	Mo Ewing	
Kevin Zimlinghaus	Tammy Cook	

Summary of Themes Presented by Breakout Groups:

Uses of the NVC:

- Resource management
- Species habitat
- Military training
- EIS required inventory and condition (regulatory requirements)
- Standard “names”
- Understanding vegetation dynamics (triggers, thresholds)
- Rare plant communities
- Inventory and mapping (forest, range resources)
- Mapping alliances and assoc
- Distribution modeling
- Crosswalking to other systems
- Common language and common units to work across boundaries – provides opportunity to do these things, but people need to know how to do it right
- Have we had a chance to use higher levels? Using diff levels, not widespread – but this issue is important
- Mapping – simple things to do to make the NVC valuable (generate map for people not familiar with an area and quickly creating information that can be commonly understood)

NVC User Needs:

- Multi-scaled hierarchy
- Structural info (beyond floristic component)
- Flexibility and crosswalking amongst other systems
- Restoration tools (how to protect it)
- Conservation (diff scales – local and landscape)
- Ecological niche modeling
- Invasives (effects) Lessons learned using the NVC within a mapping framework?
- More training and outreach
- Framework for crosswalking

Questions about the NVC:

- How “vetted” are types? Confidence in it? Quality and quantity of plots? How do you know? Who collected them?
- How to submit new types? Process of submission, how long til it’s available? Contributing plots?
- What’s the implementation process?
- How do I use it if I am new to veg classification?
- How to use and submit info to VegBank?
- Were all original types imported into the database?
- What was and is the vetting process?
- What kind of help are we going to have? How can ppl get in touch with experts?? Can you get to someone on the review team to ask questions (right now)?
- What is the need to share plot data that diff agencies are collecting?
- How did this [description] get called this?
- How do we discover data? What has been done by other people? Make it easy to get at so we don’t reinvent the wheel and can work efficiently.
- Wetlands – how they fit in and are they treated well in the classification?

Challenges/Problems/Obstacles:

- Abiotic (how does veg relate to abiotic classifications)
- How to crosswalk/relate NVC to other hierarchies
- Plant taxonomies – making sense of everything that is out there (PLANTS, IT IS, NVC, etc...)
- Patchy nature of some systems
- Structural cutoffs (height of veg and percent cover) – issues with successional communities
- Mapping habitat (how do we target the association at that point in time? How to acknowledge the state of transition that things are in?)
- Dynamics and the ability of the system to deal with gradients and changing systems – how do we deal with those things in the context of the classification and applications?
- Cultural vs. natural
- Discrete units on a continuum
- Existing vs potential vegetation
- Stability vs adaptability

General Points:

- Get it done soon 😊 Everyone is eager to implement this fully
- The NVC needs stable funding
- We may want to hold VegBank workshops at other professional society meetings
- The value of having photographs of plots is often overlooked as a valuable resource

Summary of Overall Group Discussion:

- We need to understand how we will use data when we collect it; vegetation data is critical
- Detailed vegetation maps will be the most useful tool for soil scientists; it’s unlikely anyone will fund a complete remapping for soils, but there will be projects completed in certain areas – from there you can make inferences to the areas that can’t be remapped.
- It would be useful to have a better way to quantify associations (for example, here is proof of their relationship with soil types....)
- Participants discussed refining the spatial resolution of mapping units rather than refining the thematic unit (e.g. if you want to pull out a modal concept of ESD, don’t look with plants first – start with the bigger stuff; you can get a better, bigger picture faster)
- Lines on a map are nice, but can also be a pitfall for users who don’t understand the classification’s “fuzzy” reality.
- ESDs are used as an educational tool with private landowners in the West – though many in the East aren’t familiar with using it as a conservation tool.

- In the NVC, it's important that details are fine enough so that managers can see the importance of vital habitat corridors.
- Sometimes it can be hard for the NVC to capture habitat used by migratory species – we need to better understand organisms that use terrestrial and wetland habitat.
- Remember, the NVC is a national classification standard and does not have a mapping focus (though mapping is obviously a powerful tool and application of the NVC). At the same time, the classification needs to tie into mapping for it to be valuable to resource managers.
- Some agencies are collecting observation plots rather than classification plots; agencies should realize though that they don't have to collect classification plot data in order to use the NVC.

Ideas for Next Steps:

- Try to work more closely with universities to incorporate some training and exposure to the NVC in college curricula. Possibly make this issue a focus in future ESA workshops. Discuss this issue with the ESA Education Office.
- Conduct a cost-benefit analysis (e.g. how valuable is the project to the area you're studying?) If the Panel could demonstrate the benefits of the NVC compared to the initial cost, it would help with fundraising in the future.
- Also, lay out a timeframe for NVC project needs, particularly thinking about future climate change (when do we need to come back and do resampling so that the database doesn't become too dated? Monitor the cost of doing ____ so we can analyze ____ in the future).
- Put together some detailed guidance on field methodology (such as the 12 step document on how to read a vegetation map)
- Hold a workshop on VegBank – how to use it, and how to import your data.