

**ALASKAN U.S. NATIONAL VEGETATION CLASSIFICATION WORKSHOP:
MEETING LANDFIRE NEEDS AND BEYOND**

Date: Nov 7-9, 2017

Location: Anchorage Alaska
US Forest Service
161 E 1st Avenue, Door 8
Anchorage, Alaska 99501

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WHY THE WORKSHOP IS NEEDED

The U.S. National Vegetation Classification (USNVC) is currently the least complete in Alaska. An Alaska workshop, held in January 2011, initiated drafts of mid-level USNVC types (the division, macrogroup and group), with subsequent revisions by Alaskan ecologists in 2015-2016. But there has been no systematic development of alliances and associations in boreal and arctic Alaska, despite a wide range of published materials on fine-scale plant community types (e.g., Viereck and company, Alaska Natural Heritage Program/Alaska Center for Conservation Science, pers. comm. 2012). Pacific coastal types are better developed, and have been completed in consultation with Alaska, British Columbia, and lower 48 ecologists.

What is now needed is to invite a rigorous peer review of the existing macrogroups and groups, and to establish a peer-review based process for developing alliances and associations, in collaboration with the Ecological Society of America's **NVC Review Board** (which is authorized to conduct the review on behalf of the Federal Geographic Data Committee, Vegetation Subcommittee). We have now formally established the NVC Review Board, and would like to engage Alaskan ecologists in improving the USNVC for Alaska.

Our workshop will also guide the development of LANDFIRE products. LANDFIRE is preparing to conduct a second round of national mapping, beginning in 2018, using both USNVC Groups and NatureServe Ecological Systems. LANDFIRE will use these classification revisions to improve the Map Legend concepts.

Products from this workshop will contribute directly to an improved set of LANDFIRE products, including the Existing Vegetation Type (EVT) descriptions for Groups. At a later stage, we will review Ecological Systems. These products will also set the stage for ongoing improvement of the USNVC at mid and finer scales.

A. PROJECT CONTEXT

- The USNVC Macrogroup, Group (and potentially some alliance) types, and NatureServe's Ecological Systems, provide key classification concepts to support the development of the EVT map legend for LANDFIRE.
- The USNVC provides a federal standard for multiple agencies working in Alaska, and can help integrate vegetation classification and mapping information on forests, wetlands, tundra, and other major natural features of the state.

- The USNVC classification approach is shared with our Canadian partners (Canadian NVC at cnvc-cnvc.ca), and is compatible with European and Braun-Blanquet classifications; thereby providing Alaskans with a North American perspective on boreal and coastal rainforests and wetlands and a circum-arctic understanding of Arctic tundra.
- This project can support large scale vegetation mapping. Currently, the Kenai Peninsula mapping project includes linkages to the USNVC. The Alaska GeoSpatial Council has also been approached regarding use of the USNVC.

B. OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT

1. Finalize, through peer review, a comprehensive set of ecological vegetation type concepts for USNVC groups and macrogroups for Alaska, and link concepts to Ecological Systems.
2. Review and revise the Ecological System types for Alaska. Systems were used to guide mapping for the first LANDFIRE products, and will be used again, along with NVC Groups, for the next round of mapping.
3. Identify a long-term process for developing USNVC alliances and associations across all of Alaska, and use that information to once again upgrade groups and macrogroups.

C. PROCESS

The USNVC Editor-in-Chief and Alaskan Regional Editors (Editorial Team) will work with participants to:

- i. Hold a series of webinars with key participants, in order to scope out key issues for review (September 2017)
- ii. Distribute USNVC classification documents to all workshop participants with the key issues for review (October 2017).
- iii. Host the workshop on Nov 7 – 9, 2017 to review key issues and other identified issues.
 - a. The Editorial team will facilitate review of the macrogroups and groups, recording proposed solutions identified by the workshop participants, structuring the solutions based on the submissions format for the *USNVC Proceedings*.
 - b. Participants may be divided by region (arctic, boreal, pacific), or by Landscape Conservation Cooperative region, for parts of the meeting.
- iv. Compile and distribute to additional peer reviewers who were not able to attend the workshop, a series of proposals or commentary on the macrogroups and groups, working with the format of such proposals developed by the NVC Review Board (November-December 2017).
- v. Finalize proposed revisions and submit to the NVC Data Manager, for posting on usnvc.org (February 2018).
- vi. Complete a publication that contains an Alaskan USNVC Version 2.x for all final macrogroup and group concepts for Alaska, potentially noting preliminary listings of alliances and associations, based on expert judgement (April 2018).
- vii. Present to the LANDFIRE team all final products and initiation of next steps for LANDFIRE USNVC map legend development, including review process for Ecological Systems.
- viii. Continue development of USNVC for Alaska at alliance and association levels, based on plot-based data analyses and literature synthesis, with the goal of a comprehensive publication of the USNVC for Alaska.