1 December 2006

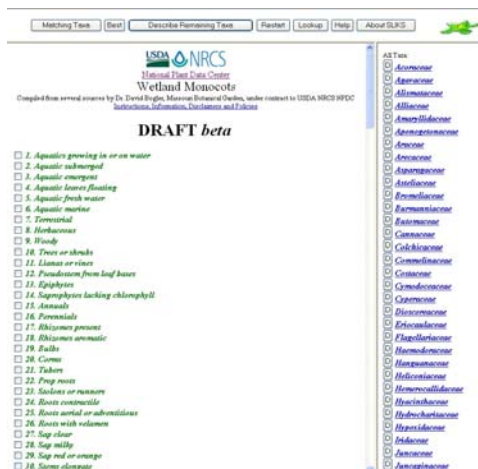## 1. Automated Plant Identification Keys Becoming Available

Plant identification is an important and routinely used skill by NRCS field personnel. The plant identification data we've developed thus far have been placed in SLIKS freeware that has received CCE approval for use on NRCS computers. These keys are known as a polyclave or multiple-entry keys as opposed to the type of key (dichotomous) that one finds in a typical flora. They permit you to use many characters at any one time to filter the choices remaining in the key.

The keys can be used on-line or downloaded. They are accessible from the NPDC Web site under Technical Resources at the following URL: http://npdc.usda.gov/technical/plantid_wetland_mono.html. . Your computer must be connected to the internet to have access to all links used in these applications.
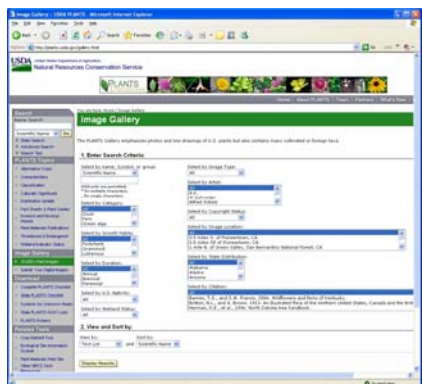
Wetland Monocots: A wetland monocot plant identification data set has been produced in collaboration with the Missouri Botanical Garden to assist the field with wetland plant identification and delineation. **Grasses:** Data for the U.S. grasses are also under development and state grass keys will be made available as the data evolve. **Other:** Data for legumes, gymnosperms, and the Ericaceae family are also under development.

You and your colleagues are encouraged to use the keys to test their accuracy for your area. For more information, please review the "Instructions, Information, Disclaimers, and Policies" link within the key.

Please provide comments on the data or the keys to Gerald "Stinger" Guala <gerald.guala@la.usda.gov>, so that the data and keys may be improved to better serve your needs. We've requested funding for software with increased functionality, but it remains unfunded for FY07.

2. PLANTS Image Gallery Remodeled

The Image Gallery has recently been modernized and its search capabilities expanded.   Search the Gallery by Artist, Image Location, State Distribution, Copyright Status, and more! Improved View and Sort options let you look at 15, 25, 50, or 100 thumbnail images per page. Best of all, synonym names are searched, too. Try *Aster* or *Scirpus* to see how this works.

We also continue to expand our image collection, which is over 30,000 now. This year, we expect to expand this by at least 10,000.

3. PLANTS Modernization Continues

The NPDC continues to modernize PLANTS to meet the new USDA Web standard. Recently modernized modules include the following: Classification, Culturally Significant, Fact Sheets & Plant Guides, and Wetland Indicator Status. These updated modules have expanded functionality so that you can query using additional parameters.

4. PLANTS Distribution Update Re-introduced

The NRCS and USDA Animal Plant Health Inspection Service – Center for Plant Health Science and Technology (CPHST) collaborated to produce the Distribution Update (DU) module. We are completing the testing of the validation portion and will soon process past submissions. The DU has yet to be modernized and is currently in the old design format.

New state or county records can be submitted based upon 1) specimen vouchers deposited in a recognized herbarium, 2) literature citations, or 3) observations. Vouchers and literature are the best means, since they can be readily validated and are the most likely to be integrated.

To initiate your first submission, you have to establish a user name and password. After using it a few times, the speed of input increases significantly. This module was established to submit a single or few new records at a time. If you have a batch of new records for submission, please contact the NPDC.

5. PLANTS Performance

PLANTS performance is still suffering, particularly during periods of heavy use, such as mid-day. We continue to address this problem. This was the result of a mandated move to a different platform in the USDA Web Farm last December. It is planned that ITC will convert PLANTS to new software and move it to the Kansas City Web Farm sometime in this fiscal year. We hope that the proposed move will significantly improve PLANTS performance.

Your Feedback is Requested

Please send comments regarding PLANTS, NPDC NewsNote, or other plant-related issues to <plants@plants.usda.gov>. Archived versions of NPDC NewsNote are available on the NPDC Web site at http://npdc.usda.gov, by clicking on the State Coordinators page.