

Draft National Vegetation Classification Standard FGDC Steering Committee Vote Talking Points

Background: The National Vegetation Classification Standard (NVCS) has helped to increase sharing of vegetation data among Federal agencies and other partners as directed by OMB Circular A-16. The 1997 Standard established a physiognomic/floristic vegetation hierarchy, established the content standard for the physiognomic levels, and initiated development of a process standard for the floristic levels. Development of the floristic classification process standard has continued since 1998 through an MOU with the Ecological Society of America (ESA), The Nature Conservancy (NatureServe), and National Biological Information Infrastructure (NBII). Revision of the physiognomic content standard began in 2003. The Subcommittee and its partners integrated the revision of the physiognomic content standard and development of the floristic process standard.

Issue: As the above activities have proceeded, it has become increasingly clear the 12-step FGDC Standards Approval Process is slow and would not easily accommodate rapid and ongoing refinement of the classification system as envisioned by the Subcommittee. We consulted with the FGDC Standards Working Group on this issue. As a result, we proposed that the NVCS be restructured as a "dynamic content standard," a hybrid incorporating both process and content standards for vegetation classification.

The overall purpose of this standard encompasses four broad objectives:

- To facilitate and support the development of a standardized vegetation classification for the United States and its use for information sharing.
- To define and adopt standards for vegetation data collection and analysis used in support of the classification.
- To maintain scientific credibility of the national classification through peer review.
- To facilitate inter-agency collaboration and inter-agency product consistency.

Summary and Key Points:

- Revises the 1997 Physiognomic Standard to resolve problems with the hierarchy
- Completes the process standard for classifying alliances and associations
- Serves as a cross-walking standard for vegetation data and information (local to global).
- Facilitate data-sharing among federal agencies and partners.
- Does not replace classification systems use by individual agencies.

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