

**NSDI Cooperative Agreements Program
Category 6**

**The National Vegetation Classification Standard:
Outreach and training to support framework layer development**

INTERIM PROJECT REPORT

October 1, 2008 – December 31, 2008

Cap Grant – Category 6 Interim Report: University of Montana, Montana Natural Heritage Program

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Project Title:

Outreach and Training on the National Vegetation Standard

Organization:

Montana Natural Heritage Program

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Executive Summary

The goals of this project are:

- To create outreach and training materials to facilitate adoption of the National Vegetation Classification standard (hereinafter "NVC") by federal agency staff, academic researchers and private entities engaged in the collection of vegetation data in the Rocky Mountains and Great Plains. These hard copy and web-based materials will include interpretation and implementation guides and keys, including crosswalks between current agency classifications, the NVC, and NatureServe/Heritage ecological systems
- To encourage broad adoption of a consistent national vegetation classification that allows compilation of national and regional summaries.
- To develop templates and data submission protocols that will facilitate incorporation of that vegetation data into the statewide Land Cover GIS data layer in Montana.

Project Narrative

Summary of Project Activities

The Montana Natural Heritage Program has identified five tasks necessary to meet the project goals. To date, we have carried out work on two of the tasks (assemble a working team to review the standards and identify training needs), which were necessary before the third, fourth and fifth tasks could be started. Additionally, we have participated in ongoing projects intended to flesh out the content of the NVC and to enable crosswalking between ReGAP map units and the NVC hierarchy. The remaining three tasks (create training materials and modules, design data submission protocols, and develop web-based outreach materials) will follow in sequence. Progress on each task is summarized below and in Table 1.

Task 1: Assemble a working team to review the standards

We assembled a team of senior ecologists, biologists, botanists and range scientists from the Forest Service, the BLM, the National Park Service, the NRCS and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to review the NVC and identify what changes would need to be made to agency data collection, classification, and metadata creation practices to meet the standard. We also met with Heritage Program ecologists from several western states for a three-day long workshop to further develop the upper level of the NVC hierarchy for western grasslands, shrublands and forests. Our working team generally agreed that adoption of the standards will be greatly facilitated by an ability to link lower levels of the hierarchy (alliances and associations) to ReGAP map units (ecological systems) and to upper hierarchy levels (groups, macrogroups, formations, divisions etc).

Task 2: Identify training needs

The working team identified several specific training needs:

- A concise NVC (version 2) overview for targeted audiences, containing a) objectives, goals and useful applications of the NVC, b) advantages and limitations, c) frequently asked questions about the NVC, d) the classification hierarchy with crosswalks to similar classifications; e) a description of how plots are done using the NVC protocols, f) a glossary of terms used in the NVC, and g) a link to the NVC standard in its entirety.
- Powerpoint presentations on the NVC for two targeted audiences, mappers and ecologists. The presentation for mappers would describe how ecologists develop and use vegetation classifications, and the presentation for ecologists will explain the status and limits of current vegetation mapping technologies.
- A powerpoint presentation aimed at federal agency line staff describing how to execute NVC standard plots in forest, grassland, scrubland, sparsely vegetated, wetland and riparian systems.
- A field training on vegetation plot data collection following NVC standards and protocols.

Task 3: Create materials and training modules

We began work on the concise NVC overview. This should be complete by the third week in January, and will be circulated to the working team for its review.

TASK	STATUS	% COMPLETE
1. Working team	ongoing	75%
2. Identify training needs	ongoing	75%
3. Training materials	underway	10%
4. Data submission templates	Not yet begun	0%
5. Web guides & materials	Not yet begun	0%

Deviations and Revised Timeline

The Montana Natural Heritage Program has deviated from the original project plan only insofar as we have increased our involvement with development of the NVC hierarchy. We are on schedule with tasks, and do not need to revise our timeline at this point.