

National Vegetation Classification Standard

WHAT ARE GEOSPATIAL STANDARDS?

The Federal Geographic Data Committee (FGDC) is a 19-member interagency government committee charged with promoting the coordinated development, use, dissemination, and sharing of geospatial data. This nationwide effort is known as the National Spatial Data Infrastructure (NSDI). In order to meet the objectives of the NSDI, the FGDC, in consultation and cooperation with state, local, and tribal governments, the private and academic sectors, and, when feasible, the international community, develops and promotes the use of geospatial data standards.

Standards facilitate the development, sharing, and use of geospatial data. FGDC Standards define data content, data models, data quality, documentation requirements, and transfer of geospatial data. They are designed to reduce data duplication and data collection costs by providing a consistent, reliable means to organize and share geospatial data. FGDC standards are developed by subcommittees and working groups through a structured process. To the extent possible, various standards are integrated with one another. Currently, the FGDC endorses 22 standards, while an additional 19 standards are in development.

A NATIONAL VEGETATION CLASSIFICATION STANDARD?

Efficient stewardship of the nation's biological resources requires a systematic inventory and classification of the systems which support these resources. However, until recently, a single classification system utilized across jurisdictional boundaries and throughout multiple collecting agencies was non-existent. Rather, conservation priorities were focused primarily at the local and regional scales, with inventory and mapping standards varying from one area to the next. Inconsistent standards of inventories and classifications compounded the difficulties inherent in management of biological resources, namely the ability to present multi-scale, synoptic views of vegetation resources.

In order to address these problems, the FGDC Vegetation Subcommittee was formed to develop a single vegetation classification and mapping standard for the United States. This effort resulted in the U.S. National Vegetation Classification (NVC) Standard, accepted by the Federal Geographic Data Committee in 1997 (FGDC 1997).

It was recognized at the time the Standard was adopted that it was far from complete. Work on refinements and further developments began immediately. In October 2007, the Vegetation Subcommittee released the National Vegetation Classification Standard, Version 2—Working Draft (FGDC 2007), a proposed revision representing a substantial overhaul of the original Standard. The FGDC formally endorsed by the National Vegetation Standard, Version 2 in February 2008.

OBJECTIVES OF THE NVC STANDARD

The overall objective of the National Vegetation Classification Standard is to support the use of a national vegetation classification system in order to produce uniform statistics about vegetation resources across the nation based on vegetation data gathered at local, regional, and/or national levels. There are four broad objectives of this standard:

1. Facilitate and support the development of a standardized vegetation classification for the United States and its Trust Territories and to ensure its use for information sharing.
2. Define and adopt standards for vegetation data collection and analysis.
3. Maintain scientific credibility of the national classification through peer review.
4. Facilitate inter-agency collaboration and inter-agency product consistency.

In order to facilitate these goals, the National Vegetation Classification Standard:

1. Fosters accuracy, consistency, and clarity in the structure, labeling, definition, and application of a systematic vegetation for the United States.
2. Establishes a national set of standards for classifying existing vegetation cover and its associated information for the United States and its Trust Territories.
3. Develops minimum metadata requirements to ensure consistent reporting on the Nation's vegetation resources.

WHO USES THE NVC STANDARD?

FGDC Standards are developed in response to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Circular A-16 (1990; revised 2002) and Executive Order 12906. Under Executive Order 12906, federal agencies collecting or producing geospatial data, either directly or indirectly, are mandated to collect data in a manner that adheres to all relevant standards adopted through the FGDC process. Unless otherwise mandated through contract or agreement, FGDC standards are voluntary for non-federal agencies.

Nonetheless, the National Vegetation Classification Standard is useful for any entities or individuals involved in any manner of floristic and vegetation collecting and mapping.