

**KEYS TO VEGETATION OF THE NORTH ATLANTIC COAST, CHESAPEAKE
BAY, AND LOWER NEW ENGLAND ECOREGIONS:
PROGRESS REPORT
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A substantial amount of new information has been collected on vegetation of the northeast by the state heritage programs over the past five years. The cost-share agreement between the USFWS and NPS allowed me to hire an ecologist to integrate this information and develop keys to three ecoregions. I hired Stephanie Neid in July 2001, and she systematically integrated the new data into the NVC over the period of July 2001 to June 2002. Once the information was integrated, we solicited review of the work by holding meetings with the state heritage ecologists. The North Atlantic Coast classification was reviewed by all the state heritage ecologists at a three-day meeting at the University of Massachusetts field station on Nantucket in April 2002. The Chesapeake Bay classification was reviewed by the heritage program staff of MD, DE and VA at a meeting two-day meeting in Maryland in spring of 2002. Stephanie developed draft keys to both the NAC and CHB prior to her departure to the New Hampshire Natural Heritage Inventory (NHNHI, also known as the NH heritage program), where she is currently contracted to continue the work on the Lower New England keys.

The North Atlantic Coast (NAC) and Chesapeake Bay (CHB) ecoregions, originally scoped as a single project, were divided into two separate sets of keys to facilitate their use. The North Atlantic keys, covering the Delaware Bay north to southern Maine, contain the following sections:

- NAC Coastal Upland Forests (completed 9/02)
- NAC Coastal Wetland Forests (completed 9/02)
- NAC Coastal Dune Vegetation (completed 9/02)
- NAC Coastal Shrubland and Natural Grasslands (completed 9/02)
- NAC Coastal Shrub Swamps and Bogs (completed 9/02)
- NAC Tidal Marshes (nearing completion, target date January 21, 2003)
- NAC Coastal Plain Pondshores (nearing completion, target date January 31, 2003)
- NAC Non-tidal Marshes (target date February 14, 2003)
- Altered Vegetation (This key will be the same for both NAC and CHB, target date May 30, 2003)

The Chesapeake Bay ecoregion, covering the area south of the Delaware Bay and including the Chesapeake Bay watershed, includes the following sections:

- CHB Coastal Upland Forests (target date February 28, 2003)
- CHB Coastal Wetland Forests (completed December 2002)
- CHB Coastal Dune Vegetation (target date March 14, 2003)
- CHB Coastal Shrubland and Natural Grasslands (target date March 28, 2003)
- CHB Coastal Shrub Swamps and Bogs (target date April 4, 2003)
- CHB Tidal Marshes (nearing completion, target date May 2, 2003)

- CHB Coastal Plain Pondshores (nearing completion, target date March 21, 2003)
- CHB Non-tidal Marshes (target date May 23, 2003)
- Altered Vegetation (see above)

The Lower New England ecoregion key is currently in progress, contracted to the New Hampshire Natural Heritage Program. We have agreed on the list of types to be included in the key, and the heritage program is integrating new information into the Lower New England classification. We have scheduled a meeting for reviewing the classification and keys by the state heritage ecologists to be held at the Great Mountain Camp in Connecticut, May 12-14, 2003. The keys are scheduled for completion by June 30, 2003.

All keys, and their accompanying vegetation descriptions, will be available for use during the field season 2003. We anticipate that the keys will be close to their final form at that time. We do anticipate that there will be some changes required as a result of their first field test. Comments will be solicited from users over the summer, and final edits will be made by the fall of 2003.

One additional item to report: NatureServe is nearing completion of another project that will be a good complement to the keys work. In March 2003, a final list of Ecological Systems (groups of plant associations that occur together on the ground influenced by the same set of processes) will be available. Funded by The Nature Conservancy, this list includes all of the U.S. and parts of Canada. Ecological Systems can be used as map units for wildlife habitat, particularly in instances where it is difficult to map at the association level.