

Colorado Plateau Vegetation Advisory Committee: A Working Model for Standardization

By Elena T. Deshler

The need to standardize a Colorado Plateau-wide vegetation classification scheme in relation to Geographic Information System (GIS) requirements was recognized two years ago, at the 1991 Colorado Plateau (COPL) Workshop. Charles van Riper, leader of the NPS CPSU at Northern Arizona State University, and several staff members identified the need, and Peter Bennett (CPSU/U/AZ) was named to chair and coordinate the effort.

Bennett has effectively brought the Colorado Plateau Vegetation Advisory Committee (CPVAC) vision into reality by creating a handbook that provides guidance to all Colorado Plateau parks. The handbook is based on the Brown, Lowe, and Pase vegetation classification system (BLP) and was presented on October 27-28, 1992, to 21 participants at a meeting to explain the methodologies and techniques suggested in the draft handbook.

At that meeting, Van Riper conceptualized the BLP hierarchical system in a triangle diagram (above). The top of the triangle represents the biogeographical realm; the base of the triangle represents the detailed

quantitative measurements designed for intensive vegetation studies. The dotted line across the triangle stands for the mappable, standard vegetation classification level, based on climax plant dominants, that would be used by Colorado Plateau parks.

Below the dotted line level, along the base, parks will have the freedom to classify their vegetation to meet specific park needs. This level would incorporate the association and sub-association levels of the BLP, utilizing detailed measurements and assessments of quantitative, as opposed to qualitative, vegetation characteristics.

Dr. Charles Lowe, one of the co-authors of BLP, gave an historical perspective of the system, emphasizing the need to incorporate both field methodology and the BLP system in order to gain a COPL vegetation map. The COPS resource managers will be responsible for the continued use and additions to the handbook, thus providing a continually evolving process that will be molded to fit the needs of the users on the Colorado Plateau.

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