



Vegetation Inventory

Background

Landcover (vegetation) inventories classify, describe, and map plant species and communities. They provide valuable baseline information about vegetation that facilitates general resource management decisions within parks and are useful for the design and implementation of other natural resource programs. The vegetation inventory is one of 12 baseline inventories conducted by the Inventory and Monitoring Program of the National Park Service. The primary purpose of natural resource inventories is to document the presence of resources in parks and to assess and document the current condition and knowledge of natural resources in the parks (National Park Service, 2009). Inventories are used as a starting point and planning tool for long-term monitoring efforts and management decisions.

The Alaska Regional Inventory and Monitoring Program manages the vegetation inventory, along with inventories of base cartography and soil, for national parks in Alaska. The state encompasses 16 park units that make up 65% of the acreage managed by the National Park Service throughout the country. Nine other inventories, which complete the set of inventories that form the baseline of biological and physical information in national parks, are managed through a combination of national, network, and park efforts.



Photo: NPS

An NPS researcher conducts a vegetation survey in an alpine area of Kenai Fjords National Park.

Inventory Products

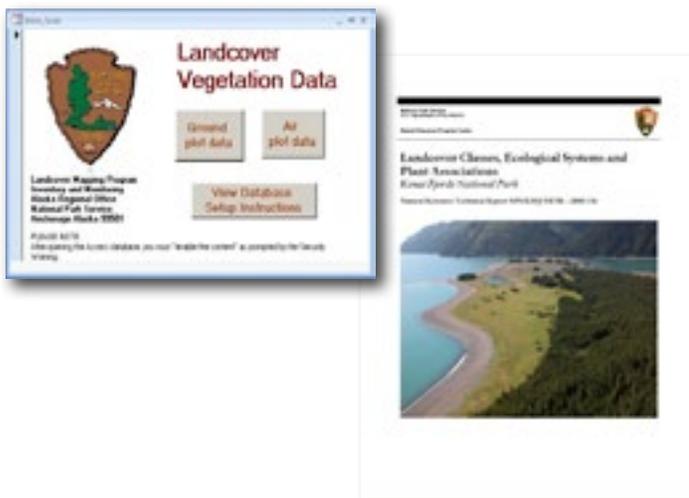
The landcover, or vegetation, inventory has a set of four derived products that, when combined, make up a delivery package.

Maps and GIS datasets are generated through a compilation of various data sources and incorporate results from fieldwork, plot data, satellite image processing, and digitization techniques. All datasets are either developed in or are compatible with ESRI ArcGIS software and are available online.

Technical reports describe the landcover inventory project processes and are comprised of technical details on map production and ecological descriptions of mapping classes. Technical reports are available online.

Image Mosaics consist of ortho-rectified mosaics of satellite images or digital aerial photos. These image mosaics can be used as a backdrop for visualization of the landscape or as a basemap for general orientation and interpretation within GIS applications.

Field Data Viewers are ArcGIS/Microsoft Access tools developed with NPS Alaska Region GIS programmers. The tool links together tabular field data, site photos, ArcGIS features, and historical data.



Landcover inventory products include field data viewers and natural resource technical reports (shown above) as well as image mosaics and landcover maps.



The vegetation, or landcover, inventory of Kenai Fjords National Park shows higher elevation areas dominated by ice and snow, diverse vegetative communities in lower elevations, and aquatic environments. The landcover map is one of four products produced as part of the vegetation inventory. A legend describing the vegetative communities identified in the inventory is below.

■ Closed Sitka Spruce	■ Open Tall Alder
■ Closed Mountain Hemlock	■ Open Tall Alder/Willow
■ Closed Sitka Spruce/Mountain Hemlock	■ Open Tall willow
■ Open Sitka Spruce	■ Closed Low Willow
■ Open Mountain Hemlock	■ Closed Low Salmonberry
■ Open Sitka Spruce/Mountain Hemlock	■ Closed Low Alder
■ Open Sitka Spruce/Black Cottonwood	■ Closed Low Alder/Willow
■ Woodland Sitka Spruce	■ Open Low Willow
■ Woodland Sitka Spruce/Black Cottonwood	■ Open Low Willow/Mesic Herbaceous
■ Woodland Sitka Spruce/Alder	■ Open Low Alder
■ Woodland Sitka Spruce/Alder/Willow	■ Open Low Alder/Willow
■ Woodland Sitka Spruce/Herbaceous	■ Open Low Shrub
■ Woodland Sitka Spruce/Mtn Hemlock	■ Dwarf Shrub
■ Woodland Mountain Hemlock	■ Dwarf Shrub/Mesic Herbaceous Mosaic
■ Krumholz	■ Mesic Herbaceous
■ Dead Forest	■ Herbaceous Marsh and Wet Meadow
■ Closed Sitka Spruce/Black Cottonwood	■ Intertidal Sparse Vegetation
■ Closed Black Cottonwood	■ Freshwater Aquatic Bed
■ Open Black Cottonwood	■ Herbaceous Peatland
■ Woodland Black Cottonwood	■ Moss/Lichen
■ Mountain Hemlock/Sitka Spruce Peatland	■ Sparse Vegetation
■ Open Low Shrub Peatland	■ Unvegetated
■ Closed Tall Alder	■ Road
■ Closed Tall willow	■ Lake
■ Closed Tall Alder/Willow	■ Pond
■ Closed Alder/Salmonberry	■ River
■ Closed Tall Salmonberry	■ Ocean
■ Closed Alder/Mesic Herbaceous Mosaic	■ Snow and Ice

Applications of Vegetation Inventories

Landcover, or vegetation inventories, are used as inputs for habitat evaluation, fire fuels modeling, I&M vital signs monitoring, and are important when describing ecological processes. Using spatial displays and analyses is an effective way to organize complex natural resource information. For example, by incorporating relatively basic information about vegetation communities and topography into a spatial analysis, managers can locate potential habitats for endangered species or predict the likely course of a wildfire (National Park Service, 2009).

Landcover maps, image mosaics, and technical reports are available for each of the national parks in Alaska through the Integrated Resource Management Applications (irma.nps.gov). A map viewer is also accessible through the Alaska Inventories website (<http://science.nature.nps.gov/im/units/akro>).

<http://science.nature.nps.gov/im/units/akso>

<http://irma.nps.gov>

National Park Service. 2009. Strategic plan for natural resource inventories: FY 2008 - FY 2012. Natural Resource Report NPS/NRPC/NRR—2009/094. National Park Service, Fort Collins, Colorado.

Status

Baseline landcover inventories have been completed for approximately 99.9% of the area in Alaska's national parks and have been delivered to thirteen of the sixteen park units. The three remaining inventories—for Alagnak Wild River, Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park, and Sitka National Historical Park—are in the final stages of data analysis and reporting. An agreement with the University of Alaska Anchorage is in place to complete the remaining work, and the anticipated completion date for all three is December 2013.

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