

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

For Cooperative Vegetation and Habitat Mapping and Classification

May 24, 2000

I. Preamble

In keeping with the policies and principles of the California Biodiversity Council, this Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is mutually agreed to by the signatories to establish a cooperative vegetation and habitat mapping relationship as a means to facilitate statewide joint data collection and processing, establish common mapping and classification standards across all ownerships, and provide timely response to both State and Federal information and analytical requirements.

II. Background

Vegetation is among the most important characteristics of California's natural environment. Vegetation provides food, shelter and breeding grounds for the State's terrestrial animal species, and provides habitat for its many plant species. Vegetation resources act as a filter for the state's watershed lands, provide valuable forest products, economic benefits, and recreational opportunities to the citizens of California. High quality data are critical for the preservation, management and risk assessment of California's ecosystems and the vegetation upon which we all depend.

Agencies involved in this MOU produce or utilize vegetation or habitat maps or classification systems in their ongoing activities. Such maps help to pinpoint habitat and species likely to be affected in any given planning area by management decisions. They also provide critical information necessary to identify and prioritize vegetation and habitat conservation priorities. Agencies with intermingled responsibilities map and classify vegetation and habitats for different purposes and in different ways. Because of these shared responsibilities among agencies, there is a need to coordinate efforts at a statewide level for greater efficiency in the use of public funds for these activities. Coordinating local and regional vegetation and habitat mapping and classification activities will avoid unnecessary duplications and insure that products meet a variety of public agency needs. This combined effort will allow improved access to data, provide greater consistency in how data is developed, and generally be more useful for on-the-ground needs of field staff. A statewide effort to facilitate more standardized mapping and vegetation and habitat classification systems will be more compatible across all areas, regardless of administrative boundaries.

III. Primary Goals

The goals of this MOU are to establish statewide vegetation and habitat data layers in compliance with the National Vegetation Classification System (NVCS) with known accuracies. Mapping will be established and maintained periodically on a regional basis.

The general strategies to accomplish this are through collaboration in the following areas:

- Facilitate the sharing of and access to vegetation information and technical expertise.
- Collaborate in identifying and implementing classification and mapping priorities, including accuracy assessments.
- Encourage greater cost sharing and/or in-kind services to implement identified priorities.
- Coordinate and collaborate with other data subcommittees of the California Biodiversity Council.

Specific objectives include:

- Develop common standards for data content, data capture methods, field procedures, accuracy assessment and documentation.
- Complete a hierarchical vegetation classification system adaptable to varying goals of the signatories and improve vegetation and habitat classification and crosswalks between systems
- Complete and maintain a vegetation map of all public and private lands in California through interagency cooperative efforts as the basis for vegetation inventories and assessments of habitats, including detection of changes.

IV. Principles of Agreement

Agency staffs agree to communicate through periodic meetings of the Science Coordinating Committee for Vegetation. Agency staffs also agree to participate in a core group to coordinate implementation of the goals and objectives of this MOU.

V. Authority

This MOU does not modify or supersede existing statutory direction of the signatories.

VI. Modifications

This Memorandum is to remain in effect until modified by the parties in writing. It is negotiable at the option of any of the parties.

VII. Termination

Any party may terminate their participation in this MOU at any time when all parties are notified in writing.

VIII. Non-Binding Obligations

This MOU is a declaration of policy and represents the intent of the parties in principle only. It is not binding on the parties. In the event the parties to this MOU desire to formalize the principle intent of this MOU, they will enter into a fully integrated agreement at a later time.

IX. Completion Date

This MOU is effective for each participating agency upon signature date shown below.

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING
For Cooperative Vegetation and Habitat Mapping and Classification

_____ Date _____
Mary D. Nichols
Secretary for Resources
The Resources Agency

_____ Date _____
Andrea E. Tuttle
Director
California Department of
Forestry and Fire Protection

_____ Date _____
Robert C. Hight
Director
California Department of
Fish and Game

_____ Date _____
Brad Powell
Regional Forester
Pacific Southwest Region
USDA Forest Service

_____ Date _____
Lester A. Snow
Regional Director
Mid-Pacific Region
Bureau of Reclamation
U.S. Department of the Interior

_____ Date _____
W.R. Gomes
Vice President
Agriculture and Natural Resources
University of California