IAVS Vegetation Classification Working Group (VCWG)

Steering Committee: Scott B. Franklin (Chair), John T. Hunter (Secretary), Javier Loidi, Corrado Marcenò, and Gonzalo Navarro Sanchez

The general scope of the VCWG includes vegetation classification at any spatial or organizational scale, particularly the underlying methodologies and standards, ultimately allowing greater understanding and crosswalks among national classification systems. To that end, the VCWG has developed 'specific tasks' focusing on specific activities and maintains a website "The IAVS Vegetation Classification Methods Website" (https://sites.google.com/site/vegclassmethods/home) as the official outlet of VCWG activities, including a discussion forum for members and the dissemination of agreed standards. In addition, the website aims to facilitate access to bibliographic and technical resources for vegetation classification (data, programs, tutorials, etc.). The website includes the Bylaws, geographical representation of current membership, and contact information to become involved (by contacting the working group Secretary John Hunter [jhunter8@bigpond.com]). Membership (currently ~400 members from more than 40 countries and six continents) is free and does not require membership in IAVS. Over the next year, elections will be held for a new steering committee.

The focus of the Steering Committee over the past year has been to help jumpstart a global classification system at the biome level. At both the 2017 and 2018 IAVS meetings, the working group established a special session and workshops. These activities lead to a joint review and synthesis paper (“Terrestrial biomes: a conceptual review”) published in Vegetation Classification & Survey. Additional ideas to follow up on from the workshops include the following. (1) Comparing digital maps of existing biome typologies for their spatial congruencies and discrepancies as well as their climatological “content”. (2) Discuss how the concept “biome” should be defined in order to be most useful for science and how a new global biome map meeting this concept can be derived.

At the IAVS 2021 Virtual Symposium, we are trying to put together a symposium on using big data for classification (and revising classifications) and a workshop on
photographic databases. The VCWG worked with Daniel Laughlin (University of Wyoming) on his Global Vegetation Project to incorporate multiple classification systems as a dropdown menu when uploading photographs, but there are many other avenues to incorporate photographs into vegetation science that we plan to discuss.