

Appendix F U.S. National Vegetation Classification System

The U.S. National Vegetation Classification System (NVCS) is a standard vegetation classification and mapping system used by numerous federal, state, and local government agencies, as well as other non-governmental organizations (e.g. state Natural Heritage programs). Boulder County Parks & Open Space is utilizing this system to map, classify, and track long-term changes in vegetation across much of its non-agricultural open space properties. The following shows the hierarchy and an example of the NVCS and provides definitions for terms used in the classification system. BCPOS classifies vegetation down to the level of Alliance.

Hierarchy of U.S. National Vegetation Classification System

Class (vegetation structure, e.g. woodland) →

Subclass (leaf phenology, e.g. evergreen woodland) →

Group (leaf type, climate type, e.g. temperate or subpolar needle-leaved evergreen woodland) →

Subgroup (degree of naturalness, e.g. natural/semi-natural temperate or subpolar needle-leaved evergreen woodland) →

Formation (other physiognomic or environmental factors, e.g. rounded-crowned temperate or subpolar needle-leaved evergreen woodland) →

Alliance (dominant species in uppermost stratum, e.g. Ponderosa pine woodland alliance) →

Association (additional dominants from any stratum, e.g. Ponderosa pine / Ross's sedge / silver sage / hairy false golden aster / needle-and-thread)

Definition of Terms (from Maybury 1999, Appendix B, p. 26)

Forest: *Trees with their crowns overlapping (generally forming 60 percent to 100 percent cover).*

Woodland: *Open stands of trees with crowns not usually touching (generally forming 25 percent to 60 percent cover).*

Shrubland: *Shrubs generally greater than 0.5 meter tall with individuals or clumps overlapping to not touching (generally forming more than 25 percent cover, with trees generally forming less than 25 percent cover). Vegetation dominated by woody vines is generally treated in this class.*

Dwarf-Shrubland: *Low-growing shrubs usually under 0.5 meter tall with individuals or clumps overlapping to not touching (generally forming greater than 25 percent cover, with trees and tall shrubs generally forming less than 25 percent cover).*

Herbaceous: *Herbaceous plants dominant (generally forming at least 25 percent cover; with trees, shrubs, and dwarf-shrubs generally forming less than 25 percent cover).*

Maybury, K.P., editor. 1999. Seeing the Forest and the Trees: Ecological Classification for Conservation. The Nature Conservancy, Arlington, VA. 23 pp. plus appendices.