



VegBank

A Permanent, Open-Access Archive for Vegetation Plot Data

**Michael T. Lee
15 April 2013
Kraków, Poland**



What is VegBank?

- VegBank is a public online vegetation plots data archive: <http://vegbank.org>
- Currently contains about 73,000 plots from North America; but no geographic limitations.
- Includes interlinked databases of plots, plants, and communities.
- VegBank has a comprehensive, user-friendly website for searching, viewing, annotating, and downloading data.



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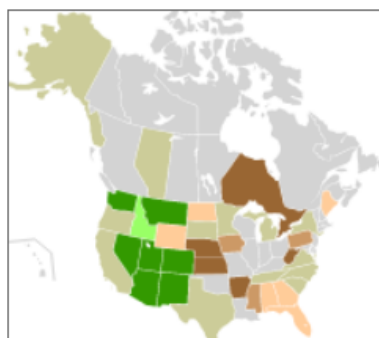
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Map Key: plots [Larger Map](#)

1-49	50-99	100-249
250-999	1,000-3,000	> 3,000

Plant Taxa

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Plant Communities

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Supplemental Data

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[Search supplemental data](#)

Data in VegBank

Plots	73,842
--Classified Plots	60,899
----to NVC communities	6,160
Plant Concepts	185,110
--accepted by USDA	48,620
----and on plots	7,961
Community Concepts	16,250
--in the NVC	8,390
----and on plots	921

News

» **Map plots:** [Example](#) | [Datacart](#) | [Multiple Datasets](#) (Requires Login)
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Tools

[Vegetation Classification](#)
[Map your own plots](#)
[VegBranch client database](#)
[Data matrix normalizer](#)

Recently Added Plots

Project (view all)	Added
Bays and wet depressions	28-Mar-13
High Calcium coastal plain	28-Mar-13
Longleaf - Coastal SC & GA	28-Mar-13
Longleaf - Fall-line Sandhills	28-Mar-13



Who developed VegBank?

Produced at:

The National Center for Ecological Analysis and Synthesis
(NCEAS), Santa Barbara, California, USA

Principal Investigators:

Robert K. Peet, University of North Carolina

Michael D. Jennings, U.S. Geological Survey

Dennis Grossman, NatureServe

Marilyn D. Walker, USDA Forest Service

Primary collaborators:

Don Faber-Langendoen, NatureServe

Michael Lee, University of North Carolina

Mark Anderson, NCEAS

Gabriel Farrell, NCEAS

John Harris, NCEAS



Partners and Support



Ecological Society of America



National Center for Ecological
Analysis and Synthesis



Federal Geographic Data Committee



National Biological Information Infrastructure



National Science Foundation



Where do the data come from?

- Many online databases simply store and deliver data from a single organization
- VegBank provides a generic data framework to house most kinds of vegetation ecology data.
- Anyone is free to provide data*
- Major data providers: research institutions, governmental agencies, non-profit organizations

*We require certification before submitting plots to filter out spam and non-serious users.



What makes VegBank different?

Other plots databases exist (NPS-PLOTS, TurboVeg, Biotics, etc.)

- Public – data access, architecture, and plot submission
- Confidentiality – protection for sensitive data
- Longevity – data lasts beyond a single project
- Search, View, Download – not a single dump of data
- Citable – any plot(s) may be cited with a unique link
- Flexible plot design – including user defined data
- Flexible plant taxonomy / community – not one list
- NVC Compliant – designed for classification plots
- Annotations supported – supports different versions of plots
- True archive – nothing is deleted, can reconstruct earlier views



How does it work?

- To provide a generic data framework that is capable of supporting most types of vegetation plot data, we must:
 - Solve problems of **ambiguous plant names**
 - Handle rare and **sensitive species**
 - Offer **intellectual property** assurances
 - Require full **metadata** documentation of methods
 - Provide solutions for **ongoing data improvements**, taxonomic changes, user annotations



Ambiguous Plant Names

- Plant names, though standardized, do not precisely identify the same set of individual plants at:
 - different **places**,
 - different **times**,
 - and according to different taxonomic **authorities**.



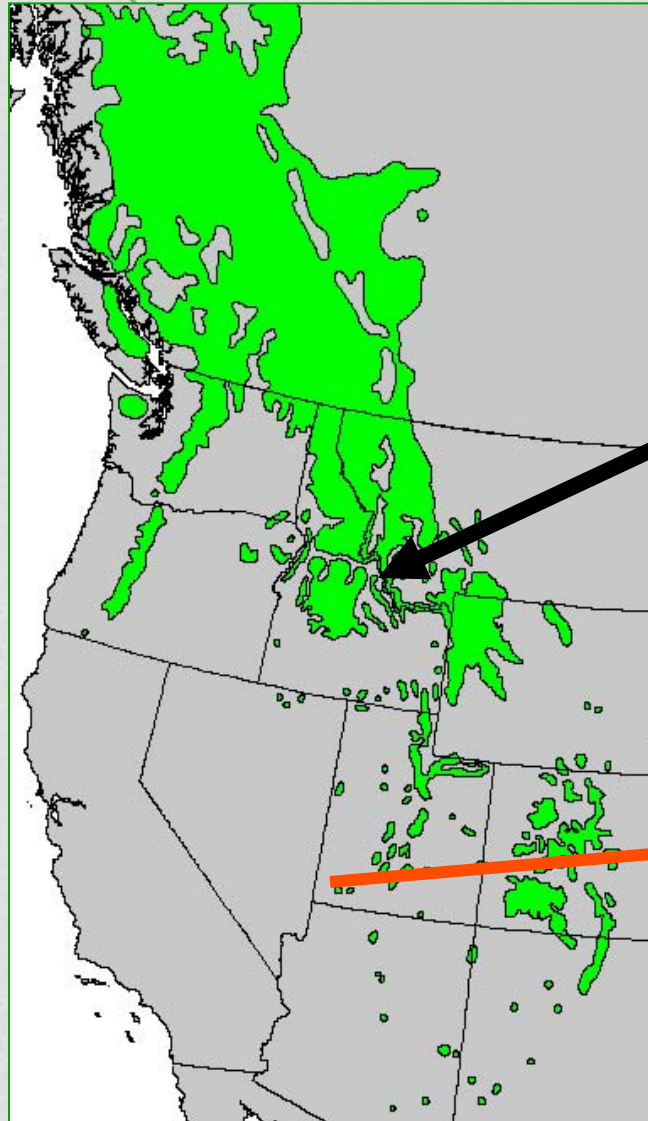
What are the fir trees of western US?

USDA* Plants & ITIS

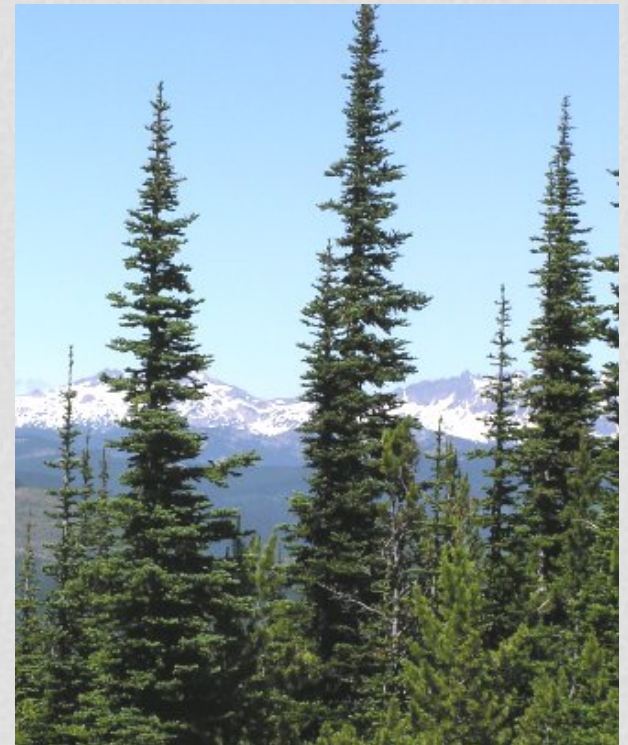
Abies lasiocarpa 

var. lasiocarpa

var. arizonica



*US Department
of Agriculture
standard plant list



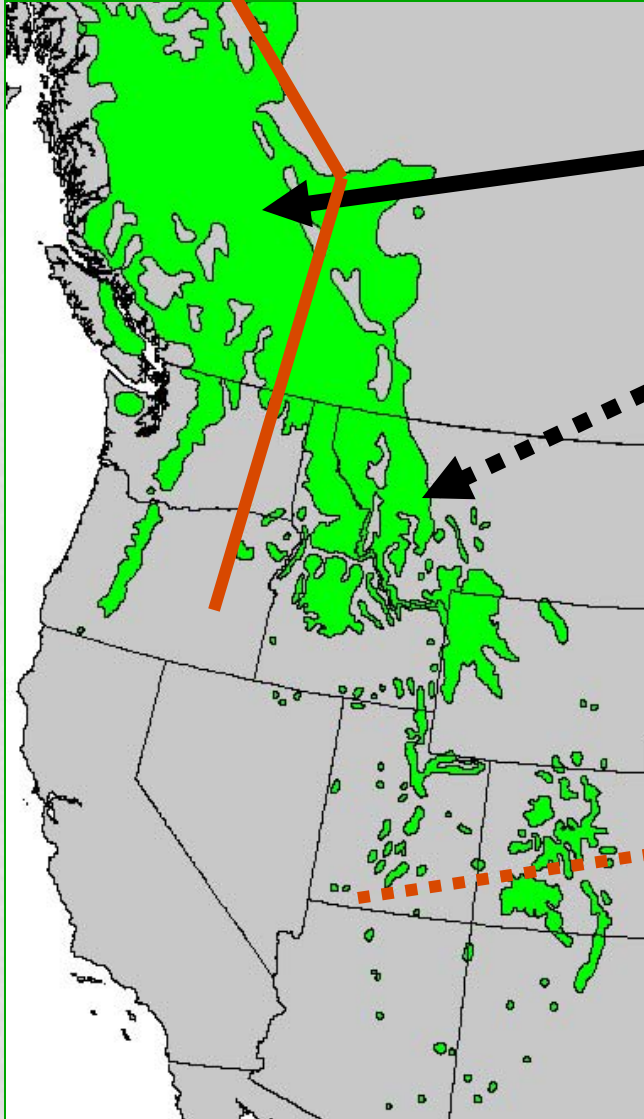


What is *Abies lasiocarpa*?

Flora North America

Abies lasiocarpa

Abies bifolia



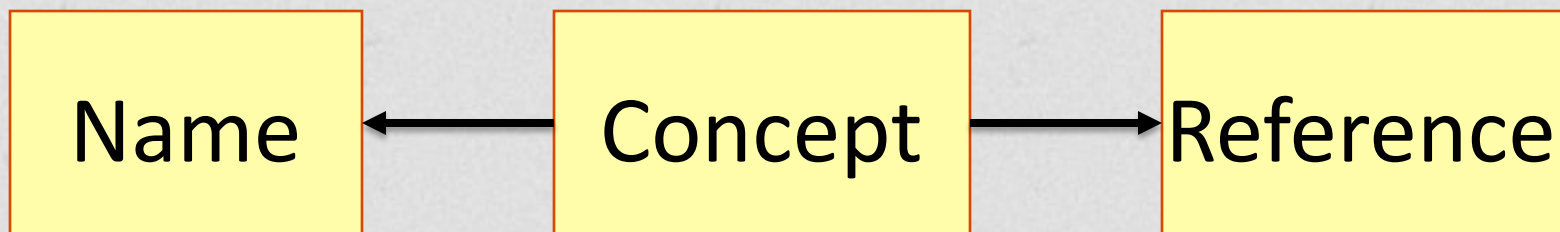
Partnership with US
Department of
Agriculture (USDA) to
provide plant concepts
for data integration





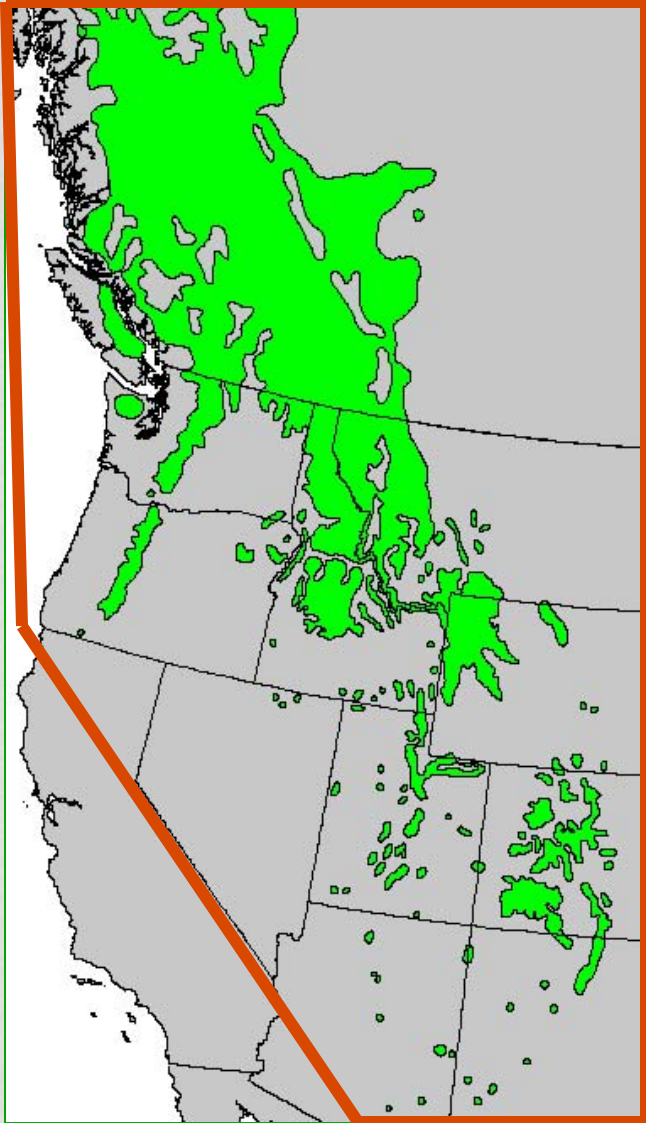
Taxonomic Concepts: Plant Name + Reference

- A taxon concept represents a unique combination of a name and a reference
- “Taxon concept” roughly equivalent to “Potential taxon” & “assertion”





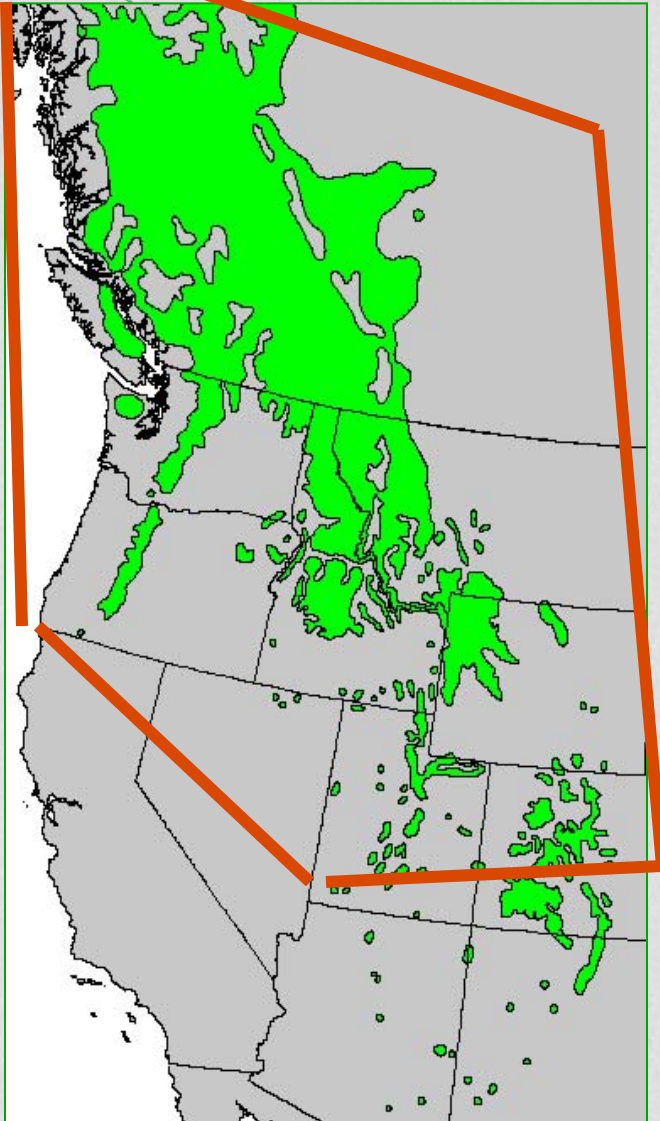
Example Plant Concepts



- *Abies lasiocarpa* sec. USDA Plants



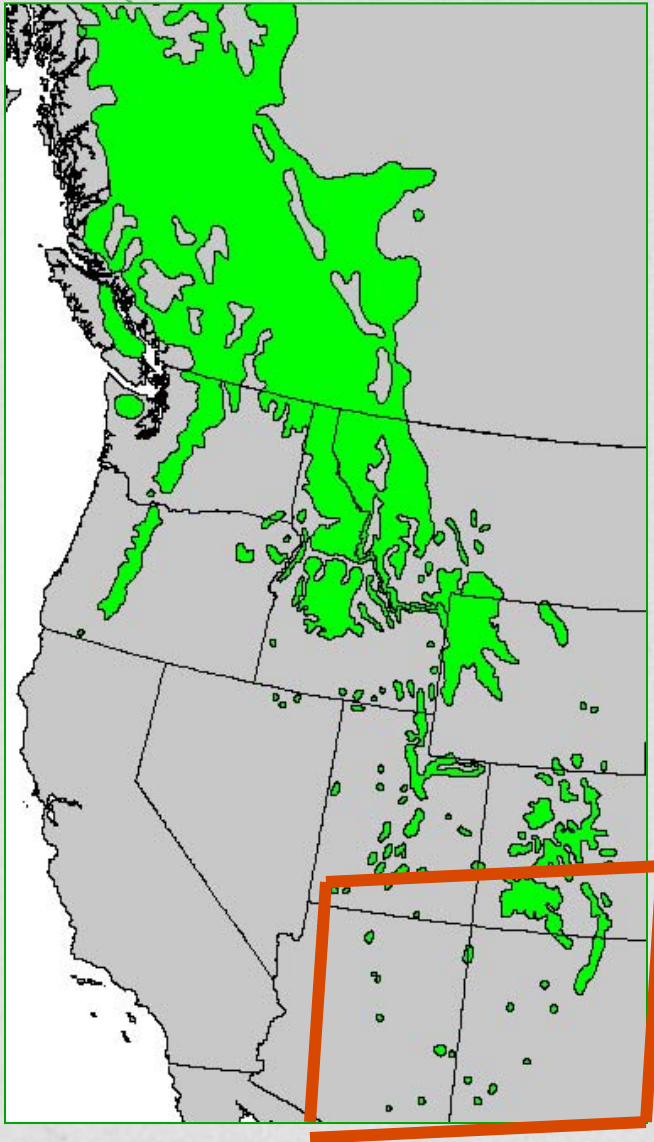
Example Plant Concepts



- *Abies lasiocarpa* sec. USDA Plants
- *Abies lasiocarpa* var. *lasiocarpa* sec. USDA Plants



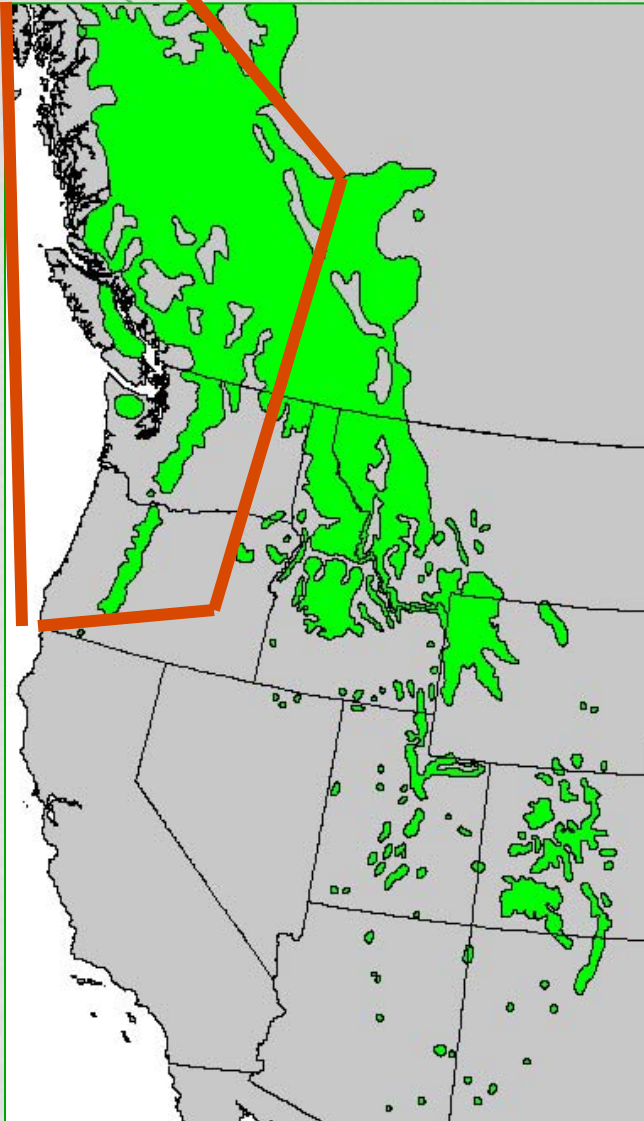
Example Plant Concepts



- *Abies lasiocarpa* sec. USDA Plants
- *Abies lasiocarpa* var. *lasiocarpa* sec. USDA Plants
- *Abies lasiocarpa* var. *arizonica* sec. USDA Plants



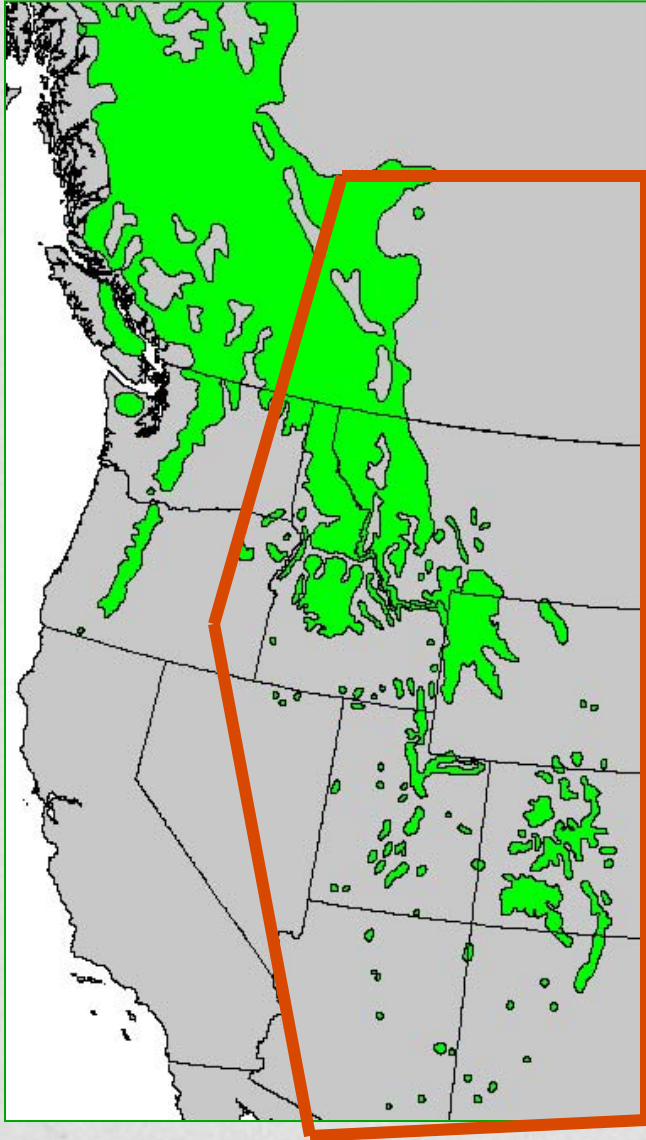
Example Plant Concepts



- *Abies lasiocarpa* sec. USDA Plants
- *Abies lasiocarpa* var. *lasiocarpa* sec. USDA Plants
- *Abies lasiocarpa* var. *arizonica* sec. USDA Plants
- *Abies lasiocarpa* sec. Flora North America



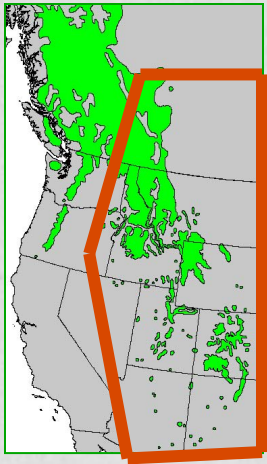
Example Plant Concepts



- *Abies lasiocarpa* sec. USDA Plants
- *Abies lasiocarpa* var. *lasiocarpa* sec. USDA Plants
- *Abies lasiocarpa* var. *arizonica* sec. USDA Plants
- *Abies lasiocarpa* sec. Flora North America
- *Abies bifolia* sec. Flora North America



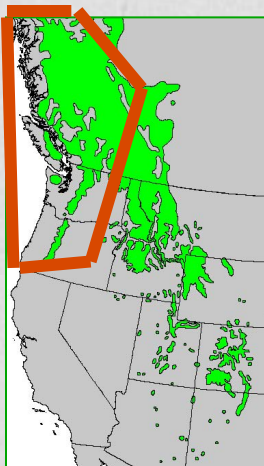
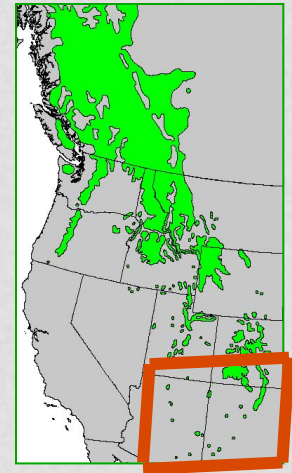
Plant Concept Relationships



Abies bifolia
sec. Flora
North
America



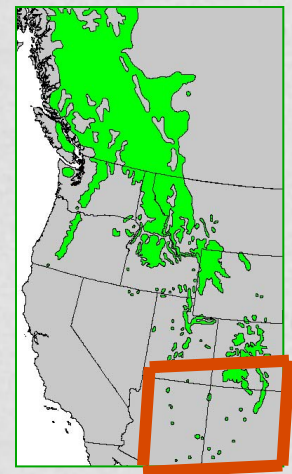
Abies
lasiocarpa var.
arizonica sec.
USDA Plants



Abies
lasiocarpa
sec. Flora
North
America



Abies
lasiocarpa var.
arizonica sec.
USDA Plants





Plant Concept Implications

- Not always tidy to sort out which names apply to which concepts
 - Not always geographically distinguishable
 - Original name often is just a name, not a concept
- Different people may have different opinions as to which concepts map onto other concepts
 - VegBank handles this with a “party perspective” where are person states their taxonomic opinions



Andropogon virginicus

in just one state in the U.S.A. has between 1 and 9 taxa, with 17 different concepts variously applied by 8 important authors.

Weakley 2005	C. Campbell (1983, FNA 2003)	Godfrey & Wooten 1979	RAB 1968	Hitchcock & Chase 1950	Blomquist 1948	Small 1933	Hackel 1889	finest entity	
<i>Andropogon capillipes</i> var. <i>capillipes</i>	<i>A. virginicus</i> var. <i>glaucus</i> "drylands variant"	<i>A. capillipes</i>	<i>A. virginicus</i>	<i>A. capillipes</i>	<i>A. capillipes</i>	<i>A. capillipes</i>	<i>A. virginicus</i> var. <i>glaucus</i> subvar. <i>glaucus</i>	capillipes entity	capillipes + dealbatus entity
<i>Andropogon capillipes</i> var. <i>dealbatus</i> (in prep.)	<i>A. virginicus</i> var. <i>glaucus</i> "wetlands variant"	<i>A. capillipes</i>	<i>A. virginicus</i>	<i>A. capillipes</i>	<i>A. capillipes</i>	<i>A. capillipes</i>	<i>A. virginicus</i> var. <i>glaucus</i> subvar. <i>dealbatus</i>	dealbatus entity	virginicus entity
<i>Andropogon virginicus</i> var. <i>virginicus</i>	<i>A. virginicus</i> var. <i>virginicus</i> "old-field variant"	<i>A. virginicus</i> var. <i>virginicus</i>	<i>A. virginicus</i>	<i>A. virginicus</i> var. <i>virginicus</i>	<i>A. virginicus</i> var. <i>virginicus</i>	<i>A. virginicus</i>	<i>A. virginicus</i> var. <i>viridis</i> subvar. <i>genuinus</i>	"old-field" entity	"glom 4" entity
<i>Andropogon virginicus</i> var. <i>virginicus</i>	<i>A. virginicus</i> var. <i>virginicus</i> "smooth variant"	<i>A. virginicus</i> var. <i>virginicus</i>	<i>A. virginicus</i>	<i>A. virginicus</i> var. <i>virginicus</i>	<i>A. virginicus</i> var. <i>virginicus</i>	<i>A. virginicus</i>	<i>A. virginicus</i> var. <i>viridis</i> subvar. <i>genuinus</i>	"smooth" entity	"glom 2a" entity
<i>Andropogon virginicus</i> var. <i>deciens</i>	<i>A. virginicus</i> var. <i>deciens</i>	<i>A. virginicus</i> var. <i>virginicus</i>	<i>A. virginicus</i>	<i>A. virginicus</i> var. <i>virginicus</i>	<i>A. virginicus</i> var. <i>virginicus</i>	<i>A. virginicus</i>	<i>A. virginicus</i> var. <i>viridis</i> subvar. <i>genuinus</i>	deciens entity	"glom 2b" entity
<i>Andropogon glaucopsis</i>	<i>A. glomeratus</i> var. <i>glaucopsis</i>	<i>A. glaucopsis</i>	<i>A. virginicus</i>	<i>A. virginicus</i> var. <i>glaucopsis</i>	<i>A. virginicus</i> var. <i>glaucopsis</i>	<i>A. glomeratus</i>	<i>A. macrourus</i> var. <i>glaucopsis</i>	glaucopsis entity	"glom 3" entity
<i>Andropogon glomeratus</i> var. <i>hirsutior</i>	<i>A. glomeratus</i> var. <i>hirsutior</i>	<i>A. virginicus</i> var. <i>abbreviatus</i>	<i>A. virginicus</i>	<i>A. virginicus</i> var. <i>hirsutior</i>	?	<i>A. glomeratus</i>	<i>A. macrourus</i> var. <i>hirsutior</i>	hirsutior entity	"latissimo" entity
<i>Andropogon glomeratus</i> var. <i>glomeratus</i>	<i>A. glomeratus</i> var. <i>glomeratus</i>	<i>A. virginicus</i> var. <i>abbreviatus</i>	<i>A. virginicus</i>	<i>A. glomeratus</i>	<i>A. glomeratus</i>	<i>A. glomeratus</i>	<i>A. macrourus</i> var. <i>abbreviatus</i>	glomeratus entity	"old-field" + "smooth" entity
<i>Andropogon tenuispathus</i>	<i>A. glomeratus</i> var. <i>pumilus</i>	<i>A. virginicus</i> var. <i>abbreviatus</i>	<i>A. virginicus</i>	<i>A. glomeratus</i>	<i>A. virginicus</i> var. <i>tenuispathus</i>	<i>A. glomeratus</i>	<i>A. macrourus</i> var. <i>genuinus</i>	tenuispathus entity	
5 species, 8 vars.	2 species, 7 vars (+ 2 informal "variants")	3 species, 4 vars.	1 species	3 species, 5 vars.	3 species, 5 vars.	3 species, 3 vars.	2 species, 7 vars.		



T&E Species, Intellectual Property

- Threatened and endangered species may be more vulnerable if their precise locations are revealed on the web.
 - These are protected by reducing precision of geocoordinates to the nearest 10, 100, or 1000 km.
 - More ecologically useful than removing the species from the public report.
- Projects and plots may be “embargoed” temporarily until after project’s initial publication.



Metadata

- VegBank provides extensive opportunities to describe the plot methodology:
 - Stratum Method (if applicable, not required)
 - Cover Method (what percent scale?)
 - Vascular plant, Bryophyte, Lichen sampling effort (or were they ignored?)
 - Plot size, shape, subplots
 - Stem sampling method (if applicable)















Annotations into the future

- Most databases allow one taxon name for each occurrence record
- VegBank allows multiple annotations for each taxon occurrence, on order to handle:
 - Different opinions from different people
 - Changing taxonomic concepts in the future
 - Error correction
- No annotations are removed – a full record is maintained to ensure a “perfect archive”

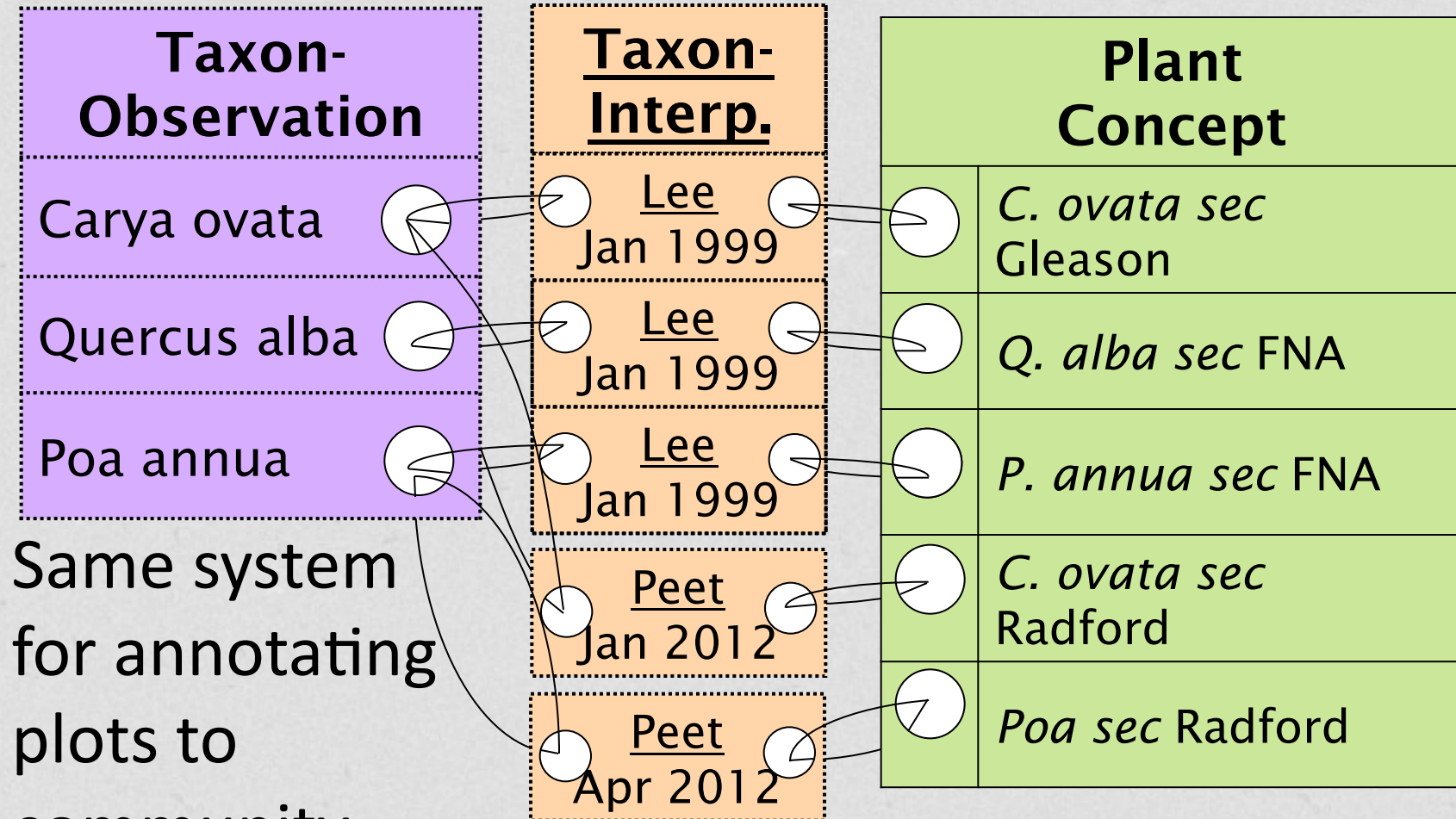


Plant Occurrence Annotations

Taxon-Observation		<u>Taxon-Interp.</u>		Plant Concept	
Carya ovata			<u>Lee</u> Jan 1999		 <i>C. ovata</i> sec Gleason
Quercus alba			<u>Lee</u> Jan 1999		 <i>Q. alba</i> sec FNA
Poa annua			<u>Lee</u> Jan 1999		 <i>P. annua</i> sec FNA



Plant Occurrence Annotations





Future Directions

- Currently we are building on VegBank to form VegBIEN, a tropical occurrence database of herbarium specimen-type data.
- Starting revision our client tool, VegBranch, and would like to help make VegBank more AVA-compatible if necessary.
- Support for emerging plot-data exchange standard called “VegX.”







Demonstration of VegBank

<http://vegbank.org>



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Recently Added Plots

Project	Added
Vegetation of the east slope ...	05-Apr-06
Cherokee National Forest	17-Nov-05
Talladega-Oakmulgee National ...	17-Nov-05
Osceola National Forest	17-Nov-05

Data in VegBank

Plots:	21540
--Classified Plots:	15191
----to NVC communities:	4996
Plant Concepts:	91984
--accepted by USDA:	43753
----and on plots:	6887
Community Concepts:	15111
--in the NVC:	8390
----and on plots:	868

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VegBank Plots

You searched for plots: In WEST VIRGINIA

Add/Drop	Author Code	Plants Found on Plot	Plot Communities
	Plot Location	Change plant label: Current Interpretation, Scientific Name without authors <input type="text"/>	
Plot #21	HAFE.22 West Virginia, United States » PLOT DETAIL	» Betula lenta (25%) » Quercus velutina (20%) » Quercus alba (15%)	No data
Plot #22	HAFE.21 West Virginia, United States » PLOT DETAIL	» Lindera benzoin (50%) » Celtis occidentalis (40%) » Platanus occidentalis (20%) » Lonicera japonica (20%) » Fraxinus pennsylvanica (20%)	No data
Plot #23	HAFE.20 West Virginia, United States » PLOT DETAIL	» Liriodendron tulipifera (30%) » Acer rubrum (25%) » Quercus velutina (20%) » Fagus grandifolia (20%) » Betula lenta (20%)	No data
Plot #24	HAFE.19 West Virginia, United States » PLOT DETAIL	» Carya alba (40%) » Quercus alba (25%) » Acer rubrum (25%) » Quercus velutina (20%) » Quercus prinus (15%)	No data

Click Plot Detail.

«[previous](#) | [1](#) | [2](#) | page 3 | [next](#)»
records 21 through 24 of 24

Viewing
Plots

Plot Detail

Comprehensive View of a Plot

Configure View

[Less Plot Detail](#) -- [Stems Detail](#) -- [Configure data displayed on this page](#)

HAFE.22	
» Citation URL: http://vegbank.org/cite/VB.Ob.3554.HAFE22	
» Citing info	
Plot ID Fields:	
Author Plot Code	HAFE.22
Author Observation Code	HAFE.22
Location Fields:	MAP: TopoZone MapQuest
Location Accuracy	5000 m
Confidentiality Status	0
Latitude	39.32159 °
Longitude	-77.72455 °

Taxa occurring on this plot-observation

Change plant label: ?

--Choose a value--

Change Strata Shown: [show strata](#)

ord	Current Interpretation, Scientific Name without authors	Stratum	Cover	Original Cover Code	Stem Diameters (graphically):
1	Quercus velutina	Canopy	20 %	03	
18	Fraxinus americana	Tall Shrub	0.5 %	01	
19	Viburnum acerifolium	Short Shrub	10 %	03	
20	Hamamelis virginiana	Short Shrub	10 %	03	
21	Acer rubrum	Short Shrub	5 %	02	
22	Quercus prinus	Short Shrub	1 %	01	
23	Parthenocissus quinquefolia	Short Shrub	1 %	01	
24	Kalmia latifolia	Short Shrub	1 %	01	
25	Toxicodendron radicans	Short Shrub	0.5 %	01	
26	Rhododendron periclymenoides	Short Shrub	0.5 %	01	
27	Prunus serotina	Short Shrub	0.5 %	01	
28	Aralia nudicaulis	Herbaceous	20 %	03	

Percent Wood	5 %
Percent Litter	15 %
Percent Bare Soil	0 %
Percent Water	0 %
Percent Other	0 %

Methods Fields:

Project	Harpers Ferry National Historic Park
Observation Start Date	08-Oct-1999
Observation End Date	08-Oct-1999
Cover Method	NPS CoverMethod
Stratum Method	National Park Service
Stem Size Limit	10 cm
Cover Dispersion	contiguous
Overall Taxon Cover Values are Automatically Calculated?	yes
Stem Sample Method	full census

Plot quality Fields:

Effort Level	Thorough
Floristic Quality	High but incom

Observation Contributors:

Party	Role
Rouse, Garrie	Plot author
Rouse, Monica	Field assistant
Vanderhorst, Jim	PI

Community Classification:

[Interpret this plot to a community concept](#)

Stratum Definitions:

Stratum Type	Stratum Base	Stratum Height	Stratum Cover
Vine/Liana			5 %
Tall Shrub	1 m	2 m	60 %
Sub-Canopy	10 m	15 m	70 %
Short Shrub	0.5 m	1 m	50 %
Nonvascular			0 %
	0.5 m		20 %

Soil Observations:

Soil Horizon	Soil Depth Top	Soil Depth Bottom	Soil Color	Soil Organic	Soil Texture	Soil Sand	Soil Silt	Soil Clay	Soil Coarse	Soil PH	Exchange Capacity	Base Saturation	Soil Description
unknown					Sandy Loams: Sandy Loam								

Disturbance Data:

Disturbance Type	Disturbance Intensity	Disturbance Comment
unknown		Hemlock dying, possibly due to infestation of wooly adelgid.



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You searched for plots in WESTVIRGINIA

add all query results to datacart, add

Add/Drop	Author Code	Plant
	Plot Location	Change
		Current Interpretation, %
Plot #21	HAFE.22 West Virginia, United States	» Betula lenta (25%) » Quercus velutina (20%) » Aralia nudicaulis (20%) » PLOT DETAIL » Tsuga canadensis » Sassafras albidum
Plot #22	HAFE.21 West Virginia, United States	» Lindera benzoin » Celtis occidentalis » PLOT DETAIL » Platanus occidentalis (20%) » Lonicera japonica (20%) » Fraxinus pennsylvanica (20%)
Plot #23	HAFE.19 West Virginia, United States	» Carya alba (40%) » Quercus alba (25%) » Acer rubrum (25%) » Quercus velutina (20%) » Quercus prinus (15%) » PLOT DETAIL
Plot #24		



DOWNLOAD this dataset to a file



PURGE all items from this dataset

WARNING: dropping all items cannot be undone

Dataset Name	WV_3
User ID	Lee, Michael
Dataset Start	25-Apr-2006
Accession Code	VB.ds.197272.U
Dataset Description	three plots in WV
Dataset Type	datacart
Dataset Sharing	private
Items in this dataset:	

Drop	Item	Item Type	Notes	M
	1. link	observation		H/
	2. link	observation		H/
	3. link	observation		H/

Dataset Manager

Advanced Datacart Features

- NEW! You can view a constancy table
- » [View Constancy Table](#)
- » More information / View Constancy Table
- NEW! You can view a map of the dataset

- Search for plots interpreted as a community
- You have **no communities** in your datacart
- » [Add communities here.](#)
- Save the datacart
- You can save this datacart and create a new datacart. This is the default.
- » [Create a new datacart.](#) This is the default.

Click Constancy Table

Click to add to datacart

Datacart & Constancy Table

VegBank Constancy Table

[Configure data displayed on this page](#)

Scientific Without Authors	Plots Dataset: WV 3 Total: 3	Average Cover	
		%	Dataset: WV 3
Celtis occidentalis	1	40.000	
Lindera benzoin	2	30.000	
Betula lenta	2	22.500	
Lonicera japonica	1	20.000	
Aralia nudicaulis	1	20.000	
Fagus grandifolia	1	20.000	
Quercus velutina	2	20.000	
Platanus occidentalis	1	20.000	
Fraxinus pennsylvanica	1	20.000	
Acer rubrum	2	20.000	
Liriodendron tulipifera	2	20.000	
Hamamelis virginiana	1	15.000	
Sassafras albidum	1	15.000	
Tsuga canadensis	1	15.000	
Juglans nigra	1	10.000	
Carya glabra	1	10.000	
Nyssa sylvatica	1	10.000	
Quercus prinus	2	10.000	
Viburnum acerifolium	1	10.000	
Allium vineale	1	10.000	

Plot Query

Plot Query:

State/Province, Country:

Choose a state, province, and/or country to find plots located there.

Note that you may select more than one value at a time. To select multiple choices, hold down the ctrl or apple key and then select each state/province/country you want to query.

State/Province (plot count)

Nevada (1061)	▲
New York (325)	
North Carolina (86)	☰
North Dakota (172)	
Oregon (797)	▼

Country (plot count)

--ANY--	▲
Canada (330)	
United States (19641)	▼

Plant Taxa:

Enter a plant name to find plots with that plant. You may also include criteria about other attributes that apply to that plant. Plots will be returned that match ALL criteria for a row. Plots will be returned that match all rows.

Use % for the wildcard. Examples: White oak, Carex%

Row	Plant Name search	Cover (%)	
		Min	Max
1	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
2	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

Vegetation Community:

Enter part of a community name to find plots classified to that community. This section functions much like the plant section above. Plots will be returned that match ALL criteria for a row. Plots will be returned that match all rows.

Use % for the wildcard. Example: Acer%Forest

Community Name [search](#)



Search VegBank Plots







Adding many plots to datacart

VegBank Plots

You searched for plots: in District of Columbia, Georgia, Maine, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia AND NOT including subplots AND Community Name is Liriodendron%

«previous | page **1** | [2](#) | [3](#) | [4](#) | [5](#) | next»
records 1 through 10 of 41

 [add all query results](#) to datacart,  [add plots on page](#) to datacart,  [drop plots on page](#) from datacart

Add/Drop	Author Code	Plants Found on Plot	Plot Communities
	Plot Location	Change plant label:  Current Interpretation, Scientific Name without authors 	
Plot #1 	CHER.54 Tennessee, » PLOT DETAIL	» Liriodendron tulipifera (62.5%) » Acer saccharum (62.5%) » Lindera benzoin (37.5%)	» Liriodendron tulipifera - Tilia americana var. heterophylla - (Aesculus flava) / Actaea racemosa Forest
Plot #2 	GRSM.222 Tennessee, United States » PLOT DETAIL	» Liriodendron tulipifera (62.5%) » Acer saccharum (37.5%) » Acer rubrum (37.5%)	» CEGL007219
Plot #3 	GRSM.79 Tennessee, United States » PLOT DETAIL	» Liriodendron tulipifera (85%) » Toxicodendron radicans ssp. radicans (17.5%) » Cornus alternifolia (17.5%)	» CEGL007219
Plot #4 	GRSM.221 Tennessee, United States » PLOT DETAIL	» Liriodendron tulipifera (62.5%) » Tsuga canadensis (37.5%) » Acer saccharum (37.5%)	» Liriodendron tulipifera - Aesculus flava - (Fraxinus americana, Tilia americana var. heterophylla) / Actaea racemosa - Laportea canadensis Forest » CEGL007710



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[HOME](#)

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[SITE MAP](#)

Map of your plots

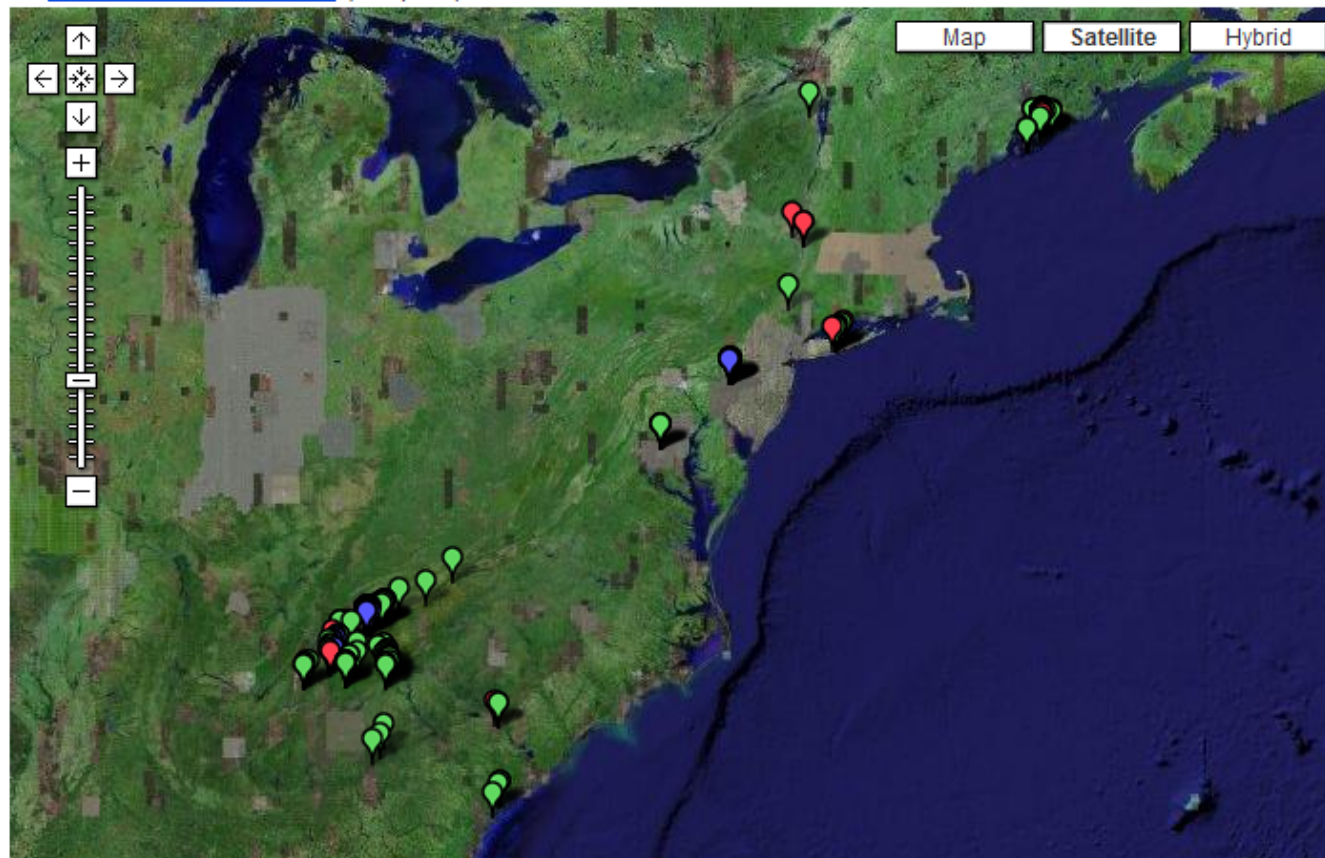
This page shows you a [Google Map](#) of your datasets selected. However, it is not compatible with all browsers, though most of the major modern browsers are satisfactory. Firefox/Mozilla and Internet Explorer are fine. See the help pages [Google's Website](#) for more on browser compatibility.

Links on this page will open in a new window (except the built in Google links), as you can move the map around, and zoom in and out, but if you use the back button to get to this page, the map will be reset.

Dataset Key: [Acer in East](#) (29 plots) [Iriodendron in East](#) (41 plots)

[Pine Communities in East](#) (114 plots)

Initial location of larger map outlined here:



Mapping several datasets