

❖ Standard 4: Make all products, methods and supporting data publicly available, in accordance with data sharing agreements.

Case Study: The Arctic Updates for the Alaska Yukon Arctic Ecoregional Assessment

by: Rebecca Esselman, Amalie Couvillion and Corinne Smith, The Nature Conservancy

Purpose and region of analysis

The Arctic Updates were produced for methods documentation and communication during the development of the Alaska-Yukon Arctic ecoregional plan. The Alaska-Yukon Arctic ecoregion spans northern Alaska, from the Arctic Ocean to the Brooks Range Mountains, and includes small parts of the Yukon and Northwest Territories of Canada.

Criteria/Methods

The Alaska-Yukon Arctic Ecoregional Assessment team periodically released sections of the ecoregional assessment in reports collectively called the Arctic Updates. Methods and results were posted on-line as they were completed establishing a transparent process. Updates were distributed to representatives from state and federal agencies, industry, NGOs, regional associations, academia and others. This allowed the public and interested groups to view and review the assessment incrementally. Updates were meant to garner support, invite scrutiny, and provide a forum for feedback on methods and results. As a final benefit, the completed ecoregional assessment report will be facilitated by including these updates as major portions of the document.

Products/Outcomes

The Arctic Updates are now available on The Nature Conservancy's public website at <http://nature.org/wherewework/northamerica/states/alaska/preserves/art13301.html> and on Conserve Online. The web page houses the updates and several supplementary maps

as well as a contact person to receive comments, inquiry and feedback. The web page will continue to be updated as more Updates are completed. Below are hotlinks to each of the updates.

Update #1: Project Description
Update #2: Predictive Terrestrial Ecosystem Model

The screenshot shows a web browser window displaying the Alaska Yukon Arctic Assessment website. The page has a blue header with navigation links: Home, How We Work, Where We Work, News Room, and About Us. Below the header, there is a sidebar on the left with links for 'Alaska' (Home, Places We Protect, Charter Areas, Press Releases, Contact Us, Ways of Giving) and 'how you can help' (donate online, renew membership, estate planning, gift ideas, volunteer, activities, events, merchandise, magazine, science publications, field guide, e-newsletter). The main content area is titled 'Alaska Yukon Arctic Assessment' and contains a paragraph: 'The following is a compilation of reports on the ongoing Alaska Yukon Arctic ecoregional assessment. Click on the title to view the report as a pdf file.' Below this is a section titled 'Updates' with a list of 11 updates, each with a link to a PDF report. To the right of the updates is a small image of a landscape with the text 'alaska-yukon-arctic' and 'ECOREGIONAL ASSESSMENT'. At the bottom of the page, there is a section for 'High Resolution Maps' with a list of map links and a note about file sizes. The footer contains contact information for Amalie Couvillion.

Update #3: Gap Analysis of Terrestrial Ecosystems
Update #4: Freshwater Ecosystem Model
Update #5: Conservation Targets
Update #6: Coastal Ecosystem Model
Update #7: Environmental Change Model
Update #8: Assessment Limitations and Data Gaps
Update #9: Cost Suitability Index
Update #10: Decision Support Tool
Update #11: Application of Ecoregional Data: Teshekpuk Lake
Update #12: Portfolio of areas of biological significance

Strengths and weaknesses

We noted several benefits of producing periodic updates, rather than waiting to produce a single final report:

- *Focus.* First, in Update #1, we listed the main components of the assessment; these became the topics of subsequent updates and kept us focused on specific deliverables.
- *Awareness.* Periodically producing and distributing the updates generated interest in our project from partners and stakeholders from the beginning. We feel that there is a much greater awareness of our work by partners due to the updates than there would have been if we had simply produced a final report.
- *New audiences.* Producing short reports that could be emailed (we made pdf's of the updates so they could be easily emailed) substantially broadened the reach of our work. We are aware of many updates that were distributed far beyond our initial audience.
- *Novel applications.* By parsing out individual components of the assessment, we could target specific experts or interest groups, allowing our work to be used by many people, for a variety of applications. For instance, by allowing the freshwater model update to stand alone (i.e., not buried in a much larger report about the entire ecoregional assessment), interested parties could adapt our work to other uses.
- *Feedback.* Updates provided an excellent avenue for receiving comments and critiques of our methods and results, ultimately making our assessment stronger.
- *Milestones.* For staff working on the assessment, the updates provided frequent opportunities to recognize our progress. This gave us renewed energy to proceed with the assessment to the next milestone, and it provided other staff not working on the assessment to appreciate our work along the way.
- *Completion.* The updates forced us to 'complete' each component of the plan. This allowed us to avoid the temptation of consistently revising data lists, models, etc. throughout the life of the plan, which tends to prolong a plan's completion.
- *Readability.* We focused on making each update brief and clear, and we tried to include at least one graphic on the first page. We felt that making the updates short, easy to understand, and full of pictures would increase the chances that our audience would read them.
- *Multiple uses.* Finally, the updates allow us to take the ecoregional assessment project in many directions. Certainly, one outcome of the assessment is a portfolio

of important areas, but we have recognized many other applications. The updates allow us to build on previous work for a variety of outcomes, and they stand as references for related projects.

Suggestions for others considering similar analysis

- We did not begin the updates until a year into the project. Although in hindsight we feel we could have begun them earlier, it is important to have a good handle on the direction, components, and limitations of your assessment before committing to a specific series of updates. We would advise other teams to spend time gathering data and developing a good understanding of the capabilities of the team, and the time and resource constraints of the project, before drafting the first update that describes the scope of the project.
- Recognize that you should spend a good deal of time preparing the updates if your goal is to have people read and appreciate them. Making the updates both brief and clear is highly important, and it often more time-consuming for the author than writing a lengthy and complex report. Include graphics and maps that support the text to draw in the reader.