

Rust, S. K. 1997. Representativeness assessment of National Forest System Research Natural Areas in Idaho. Abstracts from the 1997 Natural Areas Association Annual Meeting, August 27 - 30, 1997, Portland, Oregon.

A representativeness assessment of National Forest System (NFS) research natural areas (RNAs) in Idaho was conducted to determine the status of the natural area network and priorities for identification new RNAs. The natural distribution and abundance of communities was estimated on the subregional scale using modeled potential natural vegetation, published classification and inventory data, and Heritage plant community element occurrence data. Minimum specifications were applied at the landscape scale to select protected viable/high quality representative occurrences. In assigning community conservation priorities, decision rules were developed to encompass consideration of the adequacy and viability of representation. 1024 plant community occurrences within 214 conservation sites (including 115 NFS RNAs) were selected for analysis. Of the 1566 combinations of community and ecological section, 28 % require additional data for further analysis; 8, 40, and 12 %, respectively, are ranked from high to low conservation priority; 13 % are fully represented. Patterns in conservation need vary between section. The result provides an operational prioritization of RNA needs at landscape/subregional scales. Objective priority ranking criteria provide clear accounting of priority assignments which are easily updated to reflect changing information and/or conditions. The result demonstrates that, on the landscape and subregional scales, plant community conservation status may be effectively assessed at the plant association level of community classification hierarchy.