Northeast Regional Floristic Quality Assessment
Tools for Wetland Assessments

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March 8, 2018

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are grateful for financial assistance from the New England Interstate Water Pollution Control Commission, through EPA project funds (EPA CODE: RFA17017), and the leadership and project support provided by Kimberly Roth, NEIWPCC Environmental Analyst. She facilitated the process of setting up the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), hosting calls, and providing opportunities for us to present our results at various meetings, particularly for the New England Biological Assessment of Wetlands Work Group (NEBAWWG). The TAC provided helpful guidance throughout the duration of the project. We especially appreciated Charlie Hohn’s review of the ecoregional C values and Sandy Crystall’s editorial review of this final report.

Developing the overall methodology and data management for the Northeast Floristic Quality Assessment (FQA) tools has been a team effort. We especially thank Kristin Snow and Mary Harkness for their assistance with compiling coefficients of conservatism (C values), and for improving the EcoObs database to manage all FQA information. Michael Lee also assisted with EcoObs database revisions. We thank Everett Marshall and Eric Sorenson of the Vermont Natural Heritage Program and Justin Schlawn and Kristen Puryear of the Maine Natural Heritage Program for sharing their plot data for use in the validation process. Patrick McIntyre, NatureServe ecologist stepped in to complete the statistical analyses. Finally, Will Freyman was receptive to the idea of improving the Universal FQA Calculator website (universalfqa.org), and provided his own insights and guidance on how we might make the improvements. We thank Michele Bottiaux at NatureServe for all of the enhancements to the Universal FQA Calculator website.
Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

PROJECT ABSTRACT

I. INTRODUCTION

II. METHODOLOGY
   A. Study Area and Team
   B. Method 1. Regional Species List by Ecoregion
   C. Method 2. Assigning Ecoregional C values
   D. Method 3. FQA Validation
   E. Method 4. Regional Database with Web and Database Tools

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
   A. Regional FQA Species List
   B. Ecoregional Distribution and C value
   C. FQA Validation
   D. Web and Database Tools
      Web Tool – Universal FQA Calculator
      Database Tool – EcoObs

IV. CONCLUSIONS
   A. Project Results
   B. Future Considerations

V. REFERENCES

VI. APPENDICES
   Appendix 1. Members of 2011 State-based FQA team
   Appendix 2. Members of the Technical Advisory Committee
   Appendix 3. Example of Calibration of FQA metrics by ecological community type
   Appendix 4. Screen shots of UniversalFQA.org website and improvements
   Appendix 5. Screen shots from EcoObs
   Appendix 6. Ecoregional C-values for the Northeast
PROJECT ABSTRACT

Floristic Quality Assessment (FQA) is a robust, botanically based method for assessing the quality of ecological communities and natural areas. Integral to the method is that each native plant species in a state or region is assigned a Coefficient of Conservatism, or C value, based on its response to stressors. Species of high C values (7-10) are expected to be largely restricted to areas with minimal anthropogenic disturbances or adapted to unique natural conditions (including natural disturbances), whereas species with low C values (1-3) are expected to be largely found in ruderal or highly degraded habitats. Exotics typically receive a 0. In the Northeast Region (including six New England states and New York), C values were completed at the state level in 2011, whereby every species in each state was assigned a C value based on statewide “average behavior.” But jurisdictional units are not optimal for addressing changes in species behavior. For this reason, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and New England Interstate Water Pollution Control Commission (NEIWPCC) have supported the development of ecoregional C values, including in the Northeast. For this project, we developed ecoregional C values as follows: 1) developed a regional plant species list (3441 species, 152 subspecies or varieties and 42 hybrids) and assigned distribution by the five EPA Level III ecoregions (58, 59, 82, 83, and 84) that cover the 6 New England states of EPA Region 1, and much of New York. We used USDA PLANTS as the botanical standard; 2) assigned ecoregional (e)C values for each species, starting with an automated integration of state C values from the 2011 project, then using a team approach to produce eC values for each of the five ecoregions; 3) validated the scientific rigor of the FQA methodology by demonstrating that FQA indices, such as Mean C and Cover-Weighted (CW) Mean C, performed moderately better in responding to changing ecological conditions when based on eC values than on state C values. We found that metric performance differed by community type grouping (e.g., bogs and fens had higher CW-mean C values for high quality sites than did floodplain forests or swamps); 4) upgraded the Universal FQA Calculator website to improve its functionality for wetland data, and enhanced NatureServe’s EcoObs ecology database with a user-friendly interface that can manage the plot and site data needed for these ecoregionally based FQA calculations. Both the website and the database now contain the five ecoregional spreadsheets developed for this project. Together these improvements provide a scientifically defensible and publicly accessible ecoregional FQA method across the northeast region.

I. INTRODUCTION

Floristic Quality Assessment (FQA) is a robust, botanically based method for assessing the quality of species composition of ecological community occurrences and natural areas (Swink and Wilhelm 1979, Taft et al. 1997, Herman et al. 1997). Integral to the method is that each plant species in a state or region is assigned a Coefficient of Conservatism, or C value, based on its tolerance to degradation and dependence on pristine natural habitats and processes (Swink & Wilhelm 1994). The C values range from 0 to 10; the most highly conservative species (C values >7) are typically found under historic, natural, and restricted ecological conditions and are sensitive to anthropogenic disturbances; whereas the least conservative species (C values <3) are adapted to or tolerant of a wide range of anthropogenic disturbances. Integrating the C values of all species at a site into one or more FQA metrics can provide a
able indicator of the condition at a site (Swink and Wilhelm 1979, Miller and Wardrop 2006, DeBerry et al. 2015).

Multiple studies have now demonstrated the effectiveness of various FQA metrics in helping inform our understanding of ecological condition, particularly for wetlands (USEPA 2002, Lopez and Fennessy 2002, Matthews 2003, Bourdaghs et al. 2006, Wardrop et al. 2007, Bried et al. 2013), though validation is an ongoing process (Mabry et al. 2018). The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recognized the merits of the approach and encouraged state and regional development of the method for state wetland assessments (USEPA 2002, Medley and Scozzafava 2009). The method is more cost effective and logistically easier than other wetland assessment methods (Miller and Wardrop 2006, Cretini et al. 2011). FQA is also used in combination with other wetland assessment metrics, such as the multi-metric approach of NatureServe’s Ecological Integrity Assessment (Faber-Langendoen et al 2008, 2016), and EPA’s Vegetation Multi-Metric Index (VMMI) for the National Wetland Condition Assessment (Serenbetz 2016). There have also been adaptations to make the method less taxonomically demanding, by relying on dominant species or on readily recognizable species (Bourdaghs 2012). Although much of the interest has focused on wetland ecosystems, the approach is also applicable to upland ecosystem types (Francis et al. 2000, Taft et al. 2006, Mabry et al. 2018). For a recent summary of the FQA methodology for wetlands, see Deberry et al. (2015).

There have been criticisms of the method, including that the coefficients have inherent bias because they are subjectively assigned by a team of botanists, insufficiently validated, or too strongly influenced by rarity (see references in Matthews et al. 2015). But as Taft et al. (1997) stated at the outset of development of FQAs, “The FQA method, though subjective, permits dispassionate and repeatable application because its value judgments are predetermined.” Testing of the approach for assessing ecological condition has continued over the years, largely by comparing the response of the metrics to a predetermined anthropogenic disturbance gradient (Lopez and Fennessy 2002, Wardrop et al. 2007, Bried et al. 2013). Matthews et al. (2015) took a different approach; rather than assessing response of species to a gradient (or axis) of human degradation (which can be challenging to validate), they tested the degree to which individual species tended to co-occur with species of similar C values. They found that species C values were positively correlated with the average C value of their co-occurring species, i.e. species with high C values tended to occur at a site with other species with high C values, confirming the consistency of scoring the C values. The authors recommended that C values be developed through an iterative approach, whereby, after the initial assignment, ongoing validation is conducted using empirical datasets or monitoring programs. C values can then be reassigned by a review panel.

Developing C values has often been based on state boundaries, where a comprehensive flora is often readily available (for a current list of available state FQAs, see DeBarry et al. 2015, Table 1; Freyman et al. 2016, Table 1). Development of state FQAs has also been encouraged to support state wetland program assessments. In the northeast, all 7 states (Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Rhode Island, and Vermont) completed C values in 2011 for all plant species in each state, under the leadership of the New England Interstate Water Pollution Control Commission (NEIWPC) (Bried et al. 2012). Despite the success of the methods at the state level, Bried et al. (2012) identified several problems with extending these results to the regional level:

- Differences in C value ratings among states “suggests that a floristic quality assessment in one state will have a different meaning from the assessment in another state.”
- “Findings further imply that state lists should not be combined into a composite CoC for the region.”
Because there is strong interest in a regional approach to wetland assessments, there was a desire to address these challenges, primarily by developing C values at an ecoregional level, rather than state level (e.g. Chamberlain et al. 2012). In addition, there is concern that metrics based on the C values may need to be tailored to specific wetland types. We further explore these two challenges:

1. The assigned C values were based on state boundaries, limiting our understanding of how a species responds regionally to stressors. A species may be a generalist in one part of its range and a specialist in another part. For example, balsam fir (Abies balsamea) is a widespread species in native forests of northern New England and northern New York, regenerates well after clearcutting and fires, and can occasionally be found regenerating on abandoned farmlands and old fields (D’Orangeville et al. 2008). But it becomes increasingly specialized and may be less tolerant of anthropogenic disturbances in forests of southern New England and New York. Detecting these differences requires an ecoregional approach.

2. A second challenge for the FQA method, is that some metrics incorporate species richness, on the presumption that greater diversity also reflects higher quality. However, ecological community types naturally differ in species diversity. For example, bogs or salt marshes are typically species poor communities as compared to calcareous hardwood swamps or fens, and thus the range of FQA values expected for high quality examples of the former may be quite different than for the latter (Cretini et al. 2011). For that reason, it has been recommended that validation and interpretation of FQA metrics be completed within relatively similar community types (Ervin et al. 2006, Johnston et al. 2009, Bourdaghs 2012). In addition, others recommend using metrics, such as Mean C, that do not incorporate species richness.

In addition to these challenges, the application of the FQA as a regional tool would benefit from readily available and publicly accessible databases or web tools. Recently, a Universal FQA Calculator (universalfqa.org) was developed to provide access to the increasing number of FQA databases and to provide a web-based data entry tool that enables user to calculate FQA metrics on the web (Freyman et al. 2016). This tool allows practitioners to input their species lists and readily access the C values for their site(s), so that various FQA metrics can be readily calculated. However, the Universal FQA Calculator is currently limited in how it handles typical vegetation plot data from ecologists, and does not provide database management tools for the submitted data. To meet this need requires vegetation or site floristics databases.

In this study, we sought to improve the use of FQA for northeastern ecologists, especially for wetland programs, by addressing the following objectives:

**Objective 1: Ecoregional Regional Species**: Develop a regional plant list for the seven states in the northeast, based on standard plant taxonomy, and determine the ecoregional distribution of each species in the five ecoregions that cover EPA Region 1.

**Objective 2. Ecoregional C values**: Assign ecoregional (e)C values for all species in the northeast using the knowledge already compiled at the state level (Bried et al. 2012), but evaluated based on the species response to anthropogenic disturbances within and across the five ecoregions.

**Objective 3. FQA Validation**: Validate the FQA methodology for assessing wetland quality in the northeast, including assessing how well various FQA metrics respond to an anthropogenic disturbance gradient and the degree to which those responses vary by natural community types.
Objective 4. Regional Database with Web and Database Tools. Develop tools that will accomplish the following: a) improve the current Universal FQA Calculator for ecologically-based datasets and b) improve NatureServe’s EcoObs database to manage vegetation and site floristic datasets that are needed for FQA applications.

II. METHODOLOGY

A. Study Area and Team

Study Area: EPA Region 1 includes the six New England states of Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island and Vermont). The five EPA level III ecoregions (58, 59, 82, 83, and 84, in Griffith et al. 2009) that cover these states also extend into New York (Fig. 1). For that reason we included the New York part of those ecoregions (but not ecoregions 60 and 62). All seven states were also part of the initial Northeast project of Bried et al. (2012). A large portion of ecoregion 84 occurs in New Jersey, but no C values were available for that state when this project started. Those C value are now available (Walz et al. 2017), and it will be beneficial to re-evaluate our C values for ecoregion 84 in light of the new information.

Figure 1. Level III ecoregions (Griffith et al. 2009) in EPA Region 1 (six New England states). The map shows the full extent of the ecoregions in the U.S., except for Ecoregion 84, which extends into New Jersey’s coastal plain.

Team: We formed a team of five state and regional botanists-ecologists, all of whom had extensive experience with a state flora and/or the region’s flora and had experience with prior C value assignments (Table 1). Two of the team members, Don Cameron and Art Gilman were part of the
original state-based FQA process (Appendix 1). Our work was overseen by a Technical Advisory Committee that regularly reviewed our progress (Appendix 2).

Table 1. Members of the Ecoregional Floristic Quality Assessment Team.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State or Region</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Affiliation</th>
<th>Primary Ecoregional Responsibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Connecticut</td>
<td>Kenneth J. Metzler</td>
<td>Adjunct Professor, Environmental Education/Science Education Department, Southern Connecticut State University, New Haven, CT</td>
<td>59, and assist with 83.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maine</td>
<td>Don Cameron</td>
<td>Botanist/Ecologist, Maine Natural Areas Program, Augusta, Maine.</td>
<td>82, and assist on 58 and 59 for plant species that occur in Maine.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>Richard M. Ring</td>
<td>Research Scientist (Botanist), New York Natural Heritage Program, Albany, NY.</td>
<td>83 and 84, an assist with 58.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vermont</td>
<td>Arthur V. Gilman</td>
<td>Principal, Gilman &amp; Briggs Environmental, Barre, VT.</td>
<td>58, and assist with 83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northeast Region</td>
<td>Lesley Sneddon</td>
<td>National Ecologist, NatureServe, Boston, MA.</td>
<td>Regional review</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

B. Method 1. Regional Species List by Ecoregion.

Species List: We collected and compiled existing northeast plant data using the USDA PLANTS database (USDA, NRCS 2016) as the taxonomic authority for the development of our regional list, as was done previously for the region (Bried et al. 2012). This list provided a consistent standard for all state FQA lists within the Northeast Region (www.neiwpcc.org/wetlands/nebawwg.asp), and allowed us to compare our lists with other states and regions that also used USDA PLANTS as their taxonomic source (e.g., the Mid-Atlantic Floristic Quality Assessment Project). We focused on species level taxonomy as the most practical for field biologists using FQA methods, but retained some subspecies or varieties that had distinct C values.

Ecoregional Distribution: We downloaded the USDA PLANTS list for the 7 states in the Northeast Region from the USDA website. We used county distribution to create the initial list of taxa by Level III ecoregion (Fig. 2). County information was available through USDA PLANTS and was supplemented with county data from individual state floras where needed. Where counties straddle the ecoregion line, we added the species to both ecoregions. If a species was only reported from an ecoregion based on a county that straddled the line, we added a question mark to its ecoregion distribution. We added readily available information from PLANTS on nativity, growth form, and duration (annual, biennial, perennial). We also consulted available floras, such as the New England flora (Flora Novae-Angliae, Haines 2011) and a recently revised catalogue of the vascular plants of New York (Werier 2017) to help assess nativity and distribution. We continued to update the ecoregional distribution throughout the process.
Figure 2. Intersection of county borders with ecoregional boundaries. The large number of counties contained within one ecoregion made it feasible to use USDA PLANTS distribution to generate a first approximation of an ecoregional species list.

C. Method 2. Assigning Ecoregional C values.

**C values:** Regional coefficient values were assigned based on a scale of 0 to 10 (Table 2), guided by the definitions of Bried et al. (2012).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CoC</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>Non-native with wide range of ecological tolerances. Often these are opportunistic of intact undisturbed habitats.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 to 2</td>
<td>Native invasive or widespread native that is not typical of (or only marginally typical of) a particular plant community; tolerant of anthropogenic disturbance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 to 5</td>
<td>Native with an intermediate range of ecological tolerances and may typify a stable native community, but may also persist under some anthropogenic disturbance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 to 8</td>
<td>Native with a narrow range of ecological tolerances and typically associated with a stable community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 to 10</td>
<td>Native with a narrow range of ecological tolerances, high fidelity to particular habitat conditions, and sensitive to anthropogenic disturbance.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Nonnative Species:** For species that are nonnative to the entire region (New England and New York), we did not review ecoregional distribution, because if the species is found in any of the ecoregions, its C value is “0” regardless of the ecoregion. But for a species that is native somewhere in the ecoregion, we
displayed the ecoregion where it is nonnative as a “0”, where it is native with a “C value > 0”, and where it is absent, with a blank.

Species and Subspecies or Varieties: When integrating species C values based on the 2011 state lists into a single database, we faced the issue of what to do when one state assigned a C value to a subspecies or variety but the other state did not. We used the following rules:

1. When varieties within a species had the same C value we eliminated the varieties to reduce the taxonomic level of expertise expected to conduct FQAs.
2. If one state completed C values for varieties but other states did not, we eliminated the variety and used the lower C value for the species level C value.

Our goal was to produce an operational list of vascular plant taxa suitable for an ecoregional FQA methodology, not to create a definitive catalogue of the flora of each region.

Initial ecoregional (e)C value Automation: We first automated the process of establishing eC values, using the state based coefficients. We used the following steps to automate the process:

1. We compiled all state-based C values from Bried et al. (2012) into a single database, except that we replaced the 2011 New York FQA list with the version developed at the 2015 workshop (R. Ring pers. comm 2016).
2. We calculate an eC value for each species, in each ecoregion in which it was reported, based on the average of the C values for each state, weighted by the percentage of the state’s area found in the ecoregion. For example, *Abies balsamea* occurs in Ecoregion 83, and in the two states, New York and Vermont, covered by the ecoregion. But in EPA ecoregion 83, NY contains 90.6% of the ecoregion and VT covers 9.4%. In NY, its state C value was 6, and in VT, its state C value was 3. The calculated eC value for ecoregion 83 is thus (.906 x 6) + (.094 X 3) = 5.72, which was rounded to 6. Expert review then lowered this rank to 5. A more complex example for *Abies balsamea* is shown for ecoregion 58 (Fig. 3).
Figure 3. Explanatory figures for generating ecoregional C values.  
a) Calculation of an ecoregional score for Abies balsamea (balsam fir) in ecoergion 58, using the state C value and the proportion of a state found in the ecoregion. The initial calculation was then reviewed by the lead botanist for the ecoregion (Table 1). If the rounded calculated score was rejected, a note was added. 
b) Summary of the ecoregional C values assigned to balsam fir in each of the ecoregions in which it occurs. The process is summarized for Ecoegion 58 in Figure a, and the same process was used for the other ecoregions. The final column shows the ecoregional range of 3 (i.e., the lowest C value is 3 and the highest is 6).

3. Each ecoregional team lead (Table 1) reviewed the calculated eC value scores for all species in their ecoregion. Team leads flagged all species needing further review or consultations, as well as revised the calculated eC values where they felt appropriate, to produce a first set of eC values for each ecoregion.

Ecoregional workshop review. We reviewed all species needing review at a 2 1/2 day workshop on April 18-20, 2017? at the Albany Pine Bush center. We prioritized our review as follows:

a. Our 7-state list initially contained 3697 taxa found in the 5 ecoregions, of which 1172 (32%) are nonnative; their eC value is automatically 0 in any ecoregion in which they occurred (Table 2).
b. For the remaining initial list of 2,525 native species, we prioritized our review for species with initial eC value ranges of 3 or more (522 taxa). For example, our spreadsheet showed preliminary eC values for Abies balsamea (balsam fir) had a preliminary ecoregional range of 3 (Fig. 3b), whereas Acer saccharinum (silver maple) and Acer saccharum (sugar maple) both had an ecoregional range of 1. Thus, we examined the eC values for Abies balsamea at the workshop, but not for silver or sugar maple. We did not attempt to reconcile the ecoregional range in C values that differed by 1 or 2 (together 1,373 species), as this was too demanding an effort, with little added value.
d. We conducted expert review for all 552 species to see if there was an ecoregional basis for the distinction. For example, if the differences in eC values between ecoregions could be explained based on differences in species behavior to anthropogenic disturbances (i.e. more tolerant in one ecoregion, less so in another), then distinct eC values were retained. Otherwise, we revised the eC values to be more consistent across ecoregions. For example, expert review supported the different ecoregional scores for Abies balsamea, as it occurs more commonly in both disturbed areas and undisturbed natural areas in ecoregion 82, and was more restricted to undisturbed natural areas in ecoregions 59 and 83 (Fig 3b). All expert-based eC values were added back into the database.

f. We minimized the use of subspecies and varieties. Applying FQA requires good botanical knowledge, and the need for this expertise can limit its application (DeBerry et al. 2015). This challenge increases when subspecies or varieties of a species have distinct C or eC values. We retained subspecies in our taxa list whenever they had eC values greater than 2. But, this adds an additional taxonomic burden to the user, and we have added a species-based eC value for all species with differing subspecies or variety eC values, by taking the lower of the two values, except in the case of the native versus nonnative subspecies or variety, where we took the average. For example, high bush cranberry, which is treated as a single species in USDA PLANTS and in Flora Novae-angliae (Viburnum opulus), contains a native subspecies (Viburnum opulus ssp. trilobum) and a European subspecies (Viburnum opulus ssp. opulus). The native subspecies has eC values that range from 3 (ecoregion 84) to 4 (ecoregions 58, 59, 83), whereas the nonnative subspecies has an eC value of 0 wherever it occurs.

g. We uploaded all of our decisions, including a few changes to be consistent with USDA PLANTS, on eC values into our ecoregional database and made them available for public review. Review comments helped clarify ecoregional distribution of nonnative species, and those changes were added to the database.

D. Method 3. FQA Validation

We compiled two datasets to test FQA metrics, using both the old state C values and the new eC values. The two data sets were made available by the Maine Natural Areas Program and the Vermont Natural Heritage Inventory. Both programs are part of the Natural Heritage Network and have, as part of their mission, the documentation of exemplary or best extant locations of natural communities across their state. Thus, these sites represent reference standard conditions. The Maine data set contained a wider range of conditions, as the goal of their study was to gather data across the disturbance gradient. A primary method used by the Network for determining condition is the Element Occurrence (EORANK). For ecological communities, EORANKs provide a succinct assessment of estimated ecological integrity and probability of persistence of an occurrence, based on assessment of its condition, size, and landscape context (NatureServe 2002, Faber-Langendoen et al. 2016). The ecological integrity component of an EORANK is particularly focused on the condition and landscape context factors, with size added in as part of overall persistence and conservation value (Faber-Langendoen et al. 2016). We used either condition and landscape context together (= ecological integrity score), or condition rank alone to determine the “condition gradient,” depending on available program data. The gradient varies from A (intact or excellent rating) to D (severely disturbed, or poor) (Table 1 in Faber-Langendoen et al. 2016). The occurrences or locations to which these ranks are applied vary from small patches to large extents of a natural community types. Both programs also collected plot data within an occurrence and placed the plot in a representative part of the occurrence. Plots were 400 m² in size. A standard set of vegetation data were collected, including a full vascular plant species list, with cover estimates, and a
vegetation structure profile. For the Maine data, some locations were sampled using a meandering species list with cover values, but we included these data too, because species richness and mean C values were not significantly different between this method and their plot data methods.

The Maine data included 151 wetlands sites, with the bulk of the data concentrated in the two best documented types: large floodplain forests (115) and northern swamps (25) (Schlawin 2018). Vermont data included 398 plots, across five types: hardwood swamps (31), softwood swamps (24), open alkaline peatlands (22), open acidic peatlands (67), and oak-pine-northern hardwood forests (24). Maine projects gave greater emphasis to documenting the full range of swamp and floodplain conditions, so sites spanned the condition (ecological integrity) gradient from A to C. In addition, Maine used a scoring technique that provided a continuous scoring of condition from 4.0 (excellent) to 1.0 (poor). Because Vermont data emphasized the most exemplary stands, we largely focused on A and B condition comparisons with their data.

Data from both states were standardized to USDA PLANTS taxonomy. Plot coordinates were used to determine which ecoregion a plot was in, and eC values for that ecoregion were used to calculate both Mean C and Cover Weighted-Mean C (CW-Mean C) metrics (DeBerry et al. 2015). Most of Vermont (~90%) is covered by ecoregion 58, with small areas of ecoregion 83 (9%), and 59 (~1%). Maine is covered almost equally by Ecoregions 82 (~55%) and 58 (~42%), with a small sliver of ecoregion 59 (~3%). Maine staff calculated the FQA metrics using both the old state C values and the new eC values in their database, and then exported the metric scores to the NatureServe team. Vermont data were imported into NatureServe’s EcoObs database (Faber-Langendoen et al. 2016), where FQA metric scores were calculated. Vermont data will also be exported to VegBank (vegbank.org), where they will be made publicly available.

Validation Analysis 1. Ecoregional C value validation. We assessed whether the FQA metrics based on the eC value assigned to a species improved our interpretation of its response to the ecological integrity or condition gradient, as compared to the FQA metric values that used the original state C values. We did this comparison to determine if FQA metrics based on eC values showed a better response to an anthropogenic disturbance or condition gradient than did FQA metrics based on state C values. Our data sets were all within a state, so our validation test is fairly stringent— that is, we are testing whether, within a state that has two or three ecoregions, metrics based on eC values improved our assessment of condition over the state C values. Criteria for assessing improvement included a) higher r² value in a regression of FQA metrics in relation to a condition gradient (Maine), and b) higher F value in a boxplot/ANOVA comparison of FQA metric scores in relation to A, B and C condition ratings (Maine, Vermont).

Validation Analysis 2. Do FQA Metric Responses vary by Wetland Type? We compared values for two FQA metrics: Mean C and CW-Mean C. In Maine, we assessed scoring across A, B, and C ranked sites for the two wetland types. For Vermont, we focused on the A and B ranked sites for five natural community types.

We used R version 3.4.2 for statistical analyses (R Development Team 2017). Mean scores among condition ratings from the one-way ANOVAs were compared using Tukey HSD.
E. Method 4. Regional Database with Web and Database Tools

Field data that are needed for FQA metrics typically consist of a comprehensive species list for a plot or site, with an estimate of canopy cover (see Validation above). Data management tools are needed for both the core FQA data themselves (i.e., species lists in a plot or site, cover values, ecoregion and state location, and C values) and the full suite of site data associated with such records (location, ownership, vegetation structure, soil conditions, hydrology conditions, management observations etc.). Although it would be highly desirable to have an integrated set of web tools, our goal was limited: to ensure that users have both web and desktop database tools that readily provide these functions, even if not all in one tool. Our methods were designed to build on existing tools.

**Improved Website Capabilities of Universal FQA Calculator:** The Universal FQA Calculator website (universalfqa.org) provides a basic interface tool that a) contains the typical fields needed for entering in FQA data, and b) provides a way to download the data in a spreadsheet after it is entered. But it had several limitations in handling vegetation plot data, calculating metrics based on cover data, and documenting ecological characteristics of a site. We worked with Will Freyman, the website designer, to enhance the functionality of the website to address these limitations.

**Improved functionality of NatureServe’s EcoObs Database tool:** NatureServe has designed a Microsoft Access© vegetation plot database called EcoObs (or Ecological Observations) to manage plot data within and across states (Faber-Langendoen et al. 2016). The database provides the capability to manage C values and species taxonomy (including synonymy between different floristic standards (such as USDA PLANTS and Flora Novae Angliae)). It is already in use in neighboring states of the Northeast, including Pennsylvania and New Jersey, and is now being used in New Hampshire. We added a number of improvements to make it usable for handling eC values and calculating a variety of FQA metrics. We demonstrated its functionality in the process of completing our validation analyses (see above).

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Regional FQA Species List

Our final list of species for the 5 ecoregions combined contained 3441 species, of which 1067 (31.0%) were nonnative and 2374 are native (Table 3). We focused on species level C values, as that is the most practical level for field biologists, but eventually we also retained 152 subspecies or varieties when they had distinct C values (excluding species for which there was only one subspecies or variety in our region). We also retained 42 hybrids. For practical reasons we also retained 81 genera, whose species were all exotic, because a field biologist would only need to know the genus in order to confidently assign a C value of 0. Thus our full final list included 3686 taxa with 1176 exotic taxa.

Our list of taxa needed for FQA assessments (3697 taxa) cannot be compared directly with than that of Bried et al. (2012), because we sought to make the taxonomy as operation as possible, by only retaining
subspecies or varieties where C values differed. Bried et al. (2012) reported 4511 vascular plant taxa in the region, of which 1437 (31.8%) were nonnative in one or more states, leaving 3074 native taxa.

B. Ecoregional Distribution and C value

**Distribution:** We initially generated a list of taxa by ecoregion, which we then revised through team-based expert review. This review generated our working list of taxa by ecoregion, and for which our botanical team reviewed all C values for taxa with an ecoregional range of 3 or more. Our species level counts by ecoregion were: ecoregion 58: 3059 species, 919 exotic; ecoregion 59: 2809 species, 989 exotic; ecoregion 82: 2302 species, 1076 exotic; ecoregion 83: 3072 species, 1066 exotic; ecoregion 84: 2019 species, 481 exotic. The count for ecoregion 84 is low, because less than half of the ecoregion was included in our study area.

**Ecoregional C value:** Prior to the workshop, we generated an initial list of 552 native taxa (21.8% of all native taxa) with ecoregional ranges of 3 or more. After workshop review, we retained only 143 native taxa (5.7% of all native taxa) with ecoregional ranges of 3 or more (Table 3). Furthermore, prior to the workshop 109 species had ecoregional ranges of 5 or more, whereas after the workshop only 9 did.
These 9 species are reported in Table 4. Further review of the ecoregional values for these species is needed.

**Table 3.** Spread of eC value ranges across all taxa. Ecoregional range represents the maximum difference in eC values across the 5 ecoregions. See Figure 3 for process of determining ecoregional range. Total taxa include some genera, subspecies, varieties and hybrids. The total species count for the five ecoregions is 3441.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ecoregional Range of C values</th>
<th>Total Taxa</th>
<th>Total Taxa</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PRE WORKSHOP</td>
<td>POST WORKSHOP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>836</td>
<td>987</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>688</td>
<td>805</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>22</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total Native Taxa</td>
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<td>2510</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total Nonnatives</td>
<td>1172</td>
<td>1176</td>
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<tr>
<td>TOTAL TAXA</td>
<td>3697</td>
<td>3686</td>
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**Table 4.** The taxa with the largest ecoregional range in C-values; that is, where ecoregional range of eC values is ≥ 5. Nine species are shown, in alphabetical order.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accepted Symbol</th>
<th>Accepted Name</th>
<th>eC Value by Ecoregion</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CHBE4</td>
<td>Chenopodium berlandieri</td>
<td>5 5 2 8 8 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CUCE</td>
<td>Cuscuta cephalanthi</td>
<td>6 5 10 6 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEMO8</td>
<td>Leymus mollis</td>
<td>5 8 6 10 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POBU2</td>
<td>Polygonum buxiforme</td>
<td>4 5 7 1 5 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POER2</td>
<td>Polygonum erectum</td>
<td>4 5 2 8 6 6</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Polygonum ramosissimum</td>
<td>4 6 5 1 3 5</td>
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<tr>
<td>PSMI6</td>
<td>Pseudognaphalium</td>
<td>10 5 10 10 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SALY2</td>
<td>Salvia lyrata</td>
<td>10 3 10 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THOC2</td>
<td>Thuja occidentalis</td>
<td>5 8 3 5 7 5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

C. FQA Validation

Validation Analysis 1. Ecoregional C value validation.

In Maine, the CW-Mean C metric showed a positive correlation to a condition gradient (EIA score based on condition and landscape context) using both old state and new eC values, affirming the overall usefulness of this FQA metric in tracking wetland condition (Fig. 4a). The relationship was much stronger for swamps than for floodplain forests (Fig. 4b, c), indicating that floodplain forests tended to have more generalist species that span the disturbance gradient. In addition, for all types and for large river floodplains, the metrics based on the new eC values typically showed a modest improvement in responding to wetland condition, as compared to the metrics based on old state C values (Fig. 4, Table 5). The metrics based on eC values were also typically higher than the metrics based on the state C values. There was a slight, but not significant, improvement in the responsiveness of eC values to the gradient, as shown in the slightly steeper slope of the relationship, especially for the “all wetland types” regression (Fig 4a). A steeper slope is an improvement because it means that there is a stronger metric response to the gradient of fair to excellent sites.
Figure 4. Maine data. Response of the Cover Weighted-Mean C metric to a “condition gradient,” based on the ecological integrity assessment (EIA) score. a) All wetland types, b) large floodplain forest, c) northern swamp.

Table 5. Maine Data. Response of the Cover Weighted-Mean C and Mean C metrics to a “condition gradient” when based on state C values or eC values (see also Fig. 2). AIC (Akaike Information Criterion) is an estimator of the relative quality of the two regression models, with lower values indicating a better fit. The relative likelihood statistic compares the likelihood that the eC values model is better than the state C values model, with higher values indicating a better model. ***p<0.001  

<p>| | | | | | | |</p>
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<td>Relative Likelihood</td>
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<td></td>
<td>State C</td>
<td>eC</td>
<td>State C</td>
<td>eC</td>
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<td>eC</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mean C</td>
<td>0.28***</td>
<td>0.31***</td>
<td>264.4</td>
<td>236.3</td>
<td>&lt; 0.001</td>
<td>0.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CW-Mean C</td>
<td>0.19***</td>
<td>0.26***</td>
<td>411.4</td>
<td>379.2</td>
<td>&lt; 0.001</td>
<td>0.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large Floodplain</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean C</td>
<td>0.12***</td>
<td>0.19***</td>
<td>169.8</td>
<td>159.3</td>
<td>&lt;0.01</td>
<td>0.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CW-Mean C</td>
<td>0.11***</td>
<td>0.17***</td>
<td>315.2</td>
<td>287.4</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>0.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Swamp</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean C</td>
<td>0.60***</td>
<td>0.55***</td>
<td>29.3</td>
<td>37.8</td>
<td>0.986</td>
<td>0.014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CW-Mean C</td>
<td>0.52***</td>
<td>0.49***</td>
<td>46.8</td>
<td>50.8</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A categorical view of the FQA metrics response to the condition gradient was also informative for both Maine and Vermont data (Fig. 5). When comparing all sites, the CW-Mean C scores were significantly different between either A versus B and C, or A and B versus C (Fig 5a, b). In Maine, the same pattern was observed for Floodplain Forests and Northern Swamps, all types (Fig. 6). These results appear to be affected by sample size, because Maine data were low for A ranked sites and Vermont data were low for C ranked sites. By comparison, the Mean C metric for Maine showed distinct scores for A, B, and C sites (Fig. 5c). Further investigation is needed to determine why it performed better than the CW-Mean C metric with the Maine dataset, but it may have to do with the different eC-values for Thuja occidentalis
in ecoregion 82 versus 58, combined with changes in abundance that may not reflect changes in condition (J. Schlawin pers. comm 2018).

**Figure 5.** Maine and Vermont data, comparing categorical response of FQA metric scores to condition ratings across all types. a) CW-Mean C for Maine, b) CW-Mean C for Vermont, c) Mean C for Maine.
Validation Analysis 2. Do FQA metric Responses vary by Wetland Type?

Previous analyses looked at metric responses to the condition gradient both in general and by community type. Here we asked whether the level of response in metric scores differed by wetland types. We had sufficient data to address this for A-ranked sites for both Maine and Vermont data. Vermont data for both Alkaline and Acidic Peatlands had significantly higher CW-Mean C values than did Hardwood or Conifer Swamps (Fig. 7a). The CW-Mean C scores for Maine swamps were also comparable to Vermont’s swamps in CW-Mean C values (Fig. 7b) (we did not have sufficient floodplain forest data in Vermont to compare with Maine floodplain forests). These trends are consistent with those of Bourdaghs (2012), who also reported the highest mean C values for A-ranked sites in open and conifer bogs. Peatlands tend to have more conservative species, even though species richness is low (species richness in 400 m² plots in Vermont varied in A and B sites from 11-13 for both peatland types, as compared to 22-24 for softwood swamps and 40-44 for hardwood swamps).

By integrating the analyses shown in Figures 4 and 5, our data suggest how thresholds for FQA metrics scores can be generated for distinguishing A ranked sites from B or C ranked sites. For both the Large River Floodplain and Northern Swamp sites in Maine, the Cover Weighted-Mean C score was significantly different between A and C ranked sites, but the differences (and our ability to set thresholds) was stronger for Northern Swamps (Fig. 7b).
We draw the following conclusions from these validation analyses:

- FQA metrics based on either state or ecoregional (e)C values showed a positive response to a wetland condition gradient, validating the FQA metrics as a valuable tool for assessing wetland condition.
- Metrics based on eC values often showed a minor to moderate improvement in tracking changes in condition, suggesting eC values better reflected changes in a species behavior across its range, even within a state. We can expect that comparisons made across states would show even more improvement, and our development of eC values makes that possible. Although these improvements were not substantial, they may reflect the degree to which many northeast states are relatively small and ecologically homogeneous, such that ecological behavior did not differ strongly within any given state. This also translated into a need for only modest modification of C values when integrating state C values into eC values.
- We emphasized Cover Weighted-Mean C scores in our comparisons, but Mean C scores sometimes performed as well or better (e.g., Fig. 3a vs 3c). Further exploration of the choice of metrics for assessing wetland condition is needed.
- Metrics scores differed by community type using both state and eC values, but eC values showed a tighter set of values for A-ranked thresholds across community types. Better datasets are needed that span the full condition gradient in order to set metric thresholds. In addition, it will be helpful to have consistent wetland classifications within and across ecoregions to guide the setting of these thresholds.
- Finally, the moderate to low correlations between FQA metrics and the condition ratings suggest that other factors in wetland condition are not accounted for by the FQA metrics. These findings support the use of other vegetation metrics to more fully account for wetland condition, as done by
EPA’s vegetation multi-metric index (VMMI), or even a larger suite of wetland condition metrics, including hydrology, soils and buffer (Faber-Langendoen et al. 2016).

D. Web and Database Tools

Web Tool – Universal FQA Calculator

We enhanced the universal FQA website by making the following changes to the universalfqa.org website:

- Allow users to create, edit, save, and delete plots.
- For each plot, allow users to enter:
  - Basic plot information, including:
    - Name
    - Description
    - Size of plot
    - Cover method
    - Location
    - The ecoregion in which the plot resides
    - Field team members
    - Environmental description
    - Stratum method
    - Subplot method
  - List of species found within the full plot, including subplots/quadrats and “rest of plot.” Each list entry includes:
    - Species
    - Cover class or percent coverage
    - Sub-plot (if applicable)
  - The community type the plot represents, or for site lists, the one or more community types found at the site.
  - Fields for recording ecoregion and state in the FQA lists. Allows users to quickly find available state and eC values for their projects.
  - Updated help page on the FQA website.

All of these changes are detailed in Appendix 4. All 5 ecoregional FQA databases/spreadsheets have been uploaded to the website and are now publicly available:

- There are separate spreadsheets for each ecoregion:
  - 58, 59, 82, 83, 84
- The spreadsheets indicate which states these ecoregions apply to:
  - 58 CT, MA, ME, NH, NY, VT
  - 59 CT, MA, NH, NY, RI, VT
  - 82 ME
  - 83 NY, VT
84 MA, NY, RI (a sliver on Block Island).

The website has a download capability, so that data entered on the website, could, if desired, be imported into EcoObs for ongoing data management. Formal integration of the website with EcoObs was not feasible, as EcoObs is an Access Database, not suitable for the kind of dynamism required for a website, where multiple users could be putting in data simultaneously. Building a whole new web database was also not feasible. Rather, the upgraded Universal FQA Calculator website and the EcoObs regional database provide compatible ways for getting access to the ecoregional FQA information and calculations, with limited interoperability.

Database Tool - EcoObs

We upgraded the EcoObs (or Ecological Observations) database to serve as a regional database tool, one that readily provides FQA calculations. Wetland field assessment data typically include a comprehensive species list for a plot or site, with an estimate of canopy cover. These data are now readily linked to the FQA database with its C or \( e^C \) values to generate a wide variety of FQA metrics (Fig. 8). The database already provides the capability to manage species (including synonymy between different floristic standards, such as USDA PLANTS and *Flora Novae Angliae*) and their FQA values. Thus it provides the needed data management tools for Northeast FQA data.

![Figure 8. Screenshot of FQA indices and related metrics that can be calculated in NatureServe’s EcoObs database.](image-url)
Improvement made to the EcoObs database as part of this project include:

- Allows for calculation of rapid FQA based on a threshold for species cover (e.g., only include species with ≥ 5% cover)
- VMMI and component metrics:
  - Floristic Quality Index
  - Relative Importance of Native Plant Species
  - Count of Disturbance Tolerant Species
  - Relative Native Monocot Cover
- Relative Native Cover
- Total Native Cover
- Total Nonnative Cover
- Calculate FQA metrics by growth form (trees, shrubs, herbaceous, nonvascular)

IV. CONCLUSIONS

A. Project Results

Regional Species List by Ecoregion.
A list of plant species, based on USDA PLANTS (USDA, NRCS 2016) is provided for the project area and for each of the five Level III ecoregions in the Northeast. Our full project list included 3686 taxa with 1176 exotic taxa. Within this list, we recorded 3441 species, of which 1067 (31.0%) were nonnative and 2374 are native.

Ecoregional C values.
We focused on species level eC values, as that is the most practical level for field biologists, but we also retained 152 subspecies or varieties when they had distinct C values (excluding species for which there was only one subspecies or variety in our region), as well 42 hybrids and 81 genera, whose species were all exotic. Only 9 taxa had eC values with a range of 5 or more across the 5 ecoregions.

FQA Validation.
The ecoregional based FQA metrics were validated using datasets from Maine and Vermont. FQA metrics for assessed wetland condition performed better when using the eC values as compared to state C values. Metric scores for A-ranked sites differed significantly by natural community type.

Web and Database Tools.
We built on the existing strengths of the universal FQA website (universalFQA.org) and NatureServe’s database tools, particularly EcoObs, to provide tools that a) makes available all C values for the Northeast Region, by ecoregion and b) manages the plot and site data that are submitted for FQA calculations, and c) has either a web-based or Access-based data entry tool for species lists. EcoObs is available to partners, and is in use within the NatureServe Network and among various state agencies.
B. Future Considerations:

It is difficult to establish an ecoregional species list, because plant distribution data are not readily available at the county level. Further, maintaining the ecoregional list will be difficult because plant distribution data are not typically managed using Omernik ecoregions. Still, our current ecoregional lists, with their emphasis on species level taxonomy, appear to be comprehensive enough to meet most FQA needs.

The number of ecoregional variants is relatively low as a percentage of the region (or state) flora. Future consideration in developing ecoregional species lists would be to coordinate them with state-based species lists, where a state list is amended to include ecoregional variants, where needed. Users could then choose either a state-wide C value or an eC value.

Our eC values for New York did not include Ecoregion 60 (High Allegheny Plateau). And our assessment of Ecoregion 84 (Coastal Plain) did not include the New Jersey portion. New Jersey has now completed a state FQA list (Kathleen Walz pers. comm. 2017). By completing the New York ecoregions and integrating New Jersey FQA results into a Northeast and MidAtlantic ecoregional products, EPA and wetland assessment partners would have access to a comprehensive set of ecoregional scores from Maine to the Carolinas.

The completion of this product opens up the possibility of developing regional wetland reference datasets that can serve as benchmark sites for multiple projects, including restoration and mitigation evaluations and statewide wetland assessments (Brooks et al. 2016). These efforts will be further enhanced by the use of consistent regional and national classification systems that allow wetland ecologists to standardize the use of FQA metrics by wetland types (Bourdaghs 2012). In the northeast, state natural community classifications are already integrated into the U.S. National Vegetation Classification (usnvc.org), providing a ready solution to standardizing wetland classifications. In addition, the Hydrogeomorphic (HGM) classification also provides an important guide to standardizing wetland assessments.

V. LITERATURE CITED


VI. APPENDICES


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<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Affiliation</th>
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<tr>
<td>Connecticut</td>
<td>Don Schall</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maine</td>
<td>Matt Arsenault and Sue Gawler</td>
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<td>Ted Elliman</td>
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<td>Rick Enser</td>
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<td>Vermont</td>
<td>Art Gilman</td>
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APPENDIX 2. Members of the Technical Advisory Committee.

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<td>Wernerehl, Bob</td>
<td>Massachusetts Natural Heritage &amp; Endangered Species Program</td>
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Appendix 3 - Figure. Box and Whisker plots based on weighted mean C-values (wC) for a range of community types in Minnesota. Blues plots display the distribution of scores on minimally disturbed sites (presettlement conditions) and red plots display the distribution of scores on severely disturbed sites. Sites are arranged according to an increasing wC-values for the minimally disturbed sites (from Bourdaghs 2012).
A. APPENDIX 4. Screen shots of UniversalFQA.org website and improvements

SUMMARY OF CHANGES TO UNIVERSAL FQA WEBSITE.

Home Page
PREVIOUS

REVISION – no change

About this Website:
About this website

The Universal Floristic Quality Assessment (FQA) Calculator is an open source project licensed for use under GPLv3. Get the code on GitHub.

The Universal FQA Calculator is completely free for any user, and was developed for Openlands by Will Freyman. Questions or comments should be sent to willfreyman at gmail.com.

Photo of Styrenchium angustifolium © Lisa Culp. Used with permission.

Citation:

Read the article here. If you publish an assessment you should also cite the FQA database used to calculate the assessment.

Enhancements to this site were developed by NatureServe, a nonprofit conservation science and technology organization providing the scientific basis for effective conservation action.

Photo of Styrenchium angustifolium © Lisa Culp. Used with permission.

Citation:

Read the article here. If you publish an assessment you should also cite the FQA database used to calculate the assessment.
Welcome to the Universal FQA Calculator
To save site inventory and transect FQA studies, or to upload and share regional FQA databases you will need to create a free account.

Already have an account?
Email: 
Password: 
Log in

Create new account:
First name: 
Last name: 
Email: newuser@something.com
Password: 
Password (repeat): 
Register

universalFQA.org | About this site

REVISION – no change
PREVIOUS

REVISION- Addition of the “...Plot Assessment” option. And Cover Method is specified.

HELP TAB - Introduction
Floristic Quality Assessments (FQAs) are measurements of a natural area's habitat condition or quality. FQAs are widely used by government agencies and conservation groups to inform land management decisions.

This web-based tool calculates site inventory and transect FQAs. FQA databases published for a number of geographic regions have already been imported into the website, and users can import and customize other FQA databases as needed.

For more information, see:
- Frequently Asked Questions
- Terminology and Calculations

universalFQA.org | About this site
HELP TAB – FAQs

PREVIOUS

REVISION – added 4 new Qs, 1 modified Q &As. Starting with, What Is Mean C and Coverweighted Mean C?

REVISION – added 4 new Qs, 1 modified Q &As. Starting with, What Is Mean C and Coverweighted Mean C?
HELP TAB – Terminology

PREVIOUS

This table describes additional calculations used for Transect assessments, where species i has the percent cover $\gamma_i$.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Calculation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quadrat-level cover-weighted mean C</td>
<td>The sum of each native and non-native species’ conservation coefficient multiplied by its cover divided by the total cover for all species.</td>
<td>$\bar{C}<em>q = \sum</em>{i=0}^{n} C_i \gamma_i / \sum_{i=0}^{n} \gamma_i$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quadrat-level cover-weighted native mean C</td>
<td>The sum of each native species’ conservation coefficient multiplied by its cover divided by the total cover for all native species.</td>
<td>$\bar{C}<em>{q,n} = \sum</em>{i=0}^{n} C_i \gamma_i / \sum_{i=0}^{n} \gamma_i$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transect-level cover-weighted mean C</td>
<td>The sum of each native and non-native species’ conservation coefficient multiplied by its mean cover divided by the sum of each native species’ mean cover.</td>
<td>$\bar{C}<em>{t} = \sum</em>{i=0}^{n} C_i \gamma_i / \sum_{i=0}^{n} \gamma_i$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transect-level cover-weighted native mean C</td>
<td>The sum of each native species’ conservation coefficient multiplied by its mean cover divided by the sum of each native species’ mean cover.</td>
<td>$\bar{C}<em>{t,n} = \sum</em>{i=0}^{n} C_i \gamma_i / \sum_{i=0}^{n} \gamma_i$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cover-weighted FQI</td>
<td>Cover-weighted total mean C multiplied by the square root of the total species richness.</td>
<td>$L_{C} = \bar{C}_{t} \sqrt{N_t}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cover-weighted native mean C</td>
<td>Cover-weighted native mean C multiplied by the square root of the native species richness.</td>
<td>$L_{C,n} = \bar{C}_{t,n} \sqrt{N_t}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relative frequency (%)</td>
<td>The frequency of this species or phylogenetic group divided by the frequency of all species or phylogenetic groups.</td>
<td>$\rho_i = 100 \left( \frac{n_i}{\sum_{i=0}^{n} \gamma_i} \right)$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relative coverage (%)</td>
<td>The total coverage of this species or phylogenetic group divided by the total coverage of all species or phylogenetic groups.</td>
<td>$\tau_i = 100 \left( \frac{\gamma_i}{\sum_{i=0}^{n} \gamma_i} \right)$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relative importance value</td>
<td>The average of relative frequency and relative coverage.</td>
<td>$RIV = (\rho_i + \tau_i) / 2$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Possible Revision: Should we add the following: The top set of terms are based solely on presence/absence data (for Inventory data across an entire site, or presence/absence by quadrat). Bottom terms include abundance-weighted options.
## Inventory Assessment

### Charles Pond SNA EIA

**Date & Location:**
2014-06-24
Charles Pond SNA
Oconto, Wisconsin, USA

**FGA Database:**
Region: Wisconsin - Midwest Region
Year Published: 2014
Description:

### Details:
Practitioner: Andy Clark, Shannon Menard
Latitude: 44.70.732
Longitude: 079.03.444
Weather Notes:
Duration Notes: 4 hours
Community Type Notes: Northern Sedge Meadow
Other Notes: Dominant: > 3% are listed based on a walk through the sedge meadow.
This assessment is preliminary by all users of this webtool.

### Conservation-Based Metrics:
- **Total Mean C:** 6
- **Native Mean C:** 6
- **Total FQA:** 38.4
- **Native FQA:** 38.4
- **Adjusted FQA:** 40
- **% C value:** 0.0%
- **% C value:** 1-3: 0.0%
- **% C value:** 4-6: 66.7%
- **% C value:** 7-10: 33.3%
- **Native Treated Mean C:** 6
- **Native Shrub Mean C:** 4
- **Native Herbaceous Mean C:** 6

### Species Richness:
- **Total Species:** 3
- **Native Species:** 3 (100%)
- **Non-native Species:** 0 (0%)

### Species Wetness:
- **Mean Wetness:** 3
- **Native Mean Wetness:** 3

### Physiognomy Metrics:
- **Tree:** 0 (0%)
- **Shrub:** 0 (0%)
- **Vine:** 0 (0%)
- **Fern:** 0 (0%)
- **Grass:** 33.3%
- **Sedge:** 26.7%
- **Rush:** 0 (0%)
- **Bryophyte:** 0 (0%)

### Duration Metrics:
- **Annual:** 0 (0%)
- **Perennial:** 3 (100%)
- **Briar:** 0 (0%)

### Species Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scientific Name</th>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Native?</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>W</th>
<th>Physiognomy</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Common Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Calamagrostis canadensis; Calamagrostis macaronia; Calamagrostis atriplicifolia; Calamagrostis epigejos var. robusta; Calamagrostis inexpectata var. suprema; Calamagrostis inexpectata var. robusta</td>
<td>Poaceae</td>
<td>CALCA</td>
<td>Native</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Grass</td>
<td>Perennial</td>
<td>Blue joint grass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carex lacustris; Carex superba var. lacustris</td>
<td>Cyperaceae</td>
<td>OLOCA</td>
<td>Native</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Sedge</td>
<td>Perennial</td>
<td>Common sedge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carex stricta; Carex stricta; Carex xerocarpa</td>
<td>Cyperaceae</td>
<td>OSTR</td>
<td>Native</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Sedge</td>
<td>Perennial</td>
<td>Limpet sedge</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**REVISION — no changes.**
SELECTED TRANSECT/PLOT ASSESSMENT - SUMMARY PAGE

[reminder, you get here by going to “Your assessments” then clicking on an individual Transect/Plot Assessment]

PREVIOUS

REVISION – Expanded field options in “Details.”: New Section “Transect/Plot Design”

QUADRAT DATA

PREVIOUS

VI-12
REVISIONS – added a column for cover range (midpoint) so that if cover scale is used, the midpoint cover is provided and used in all cover weighted terms.
DATA ENTRY. PART 1: SPECIFYING TRANSECT OR PLOT DESIGN
PREVIOUS: Only Transect and Quadrat data allowed.

REVISIONS (next page)
REVISIONS. Headers introduced (“Date & Location,” “Details,” “Transect/Plot Design”). Plots with Quadrats or Subplots terminology added.

DATA ENTRY. PART 2: TRANSECTS/QUADRATS, OR PLOTS, SUBPLOTS AND QUADRATS
REVISIONS
DATA ENTRY. PART 3: ADD NEW QUADRAT/SUBPLOT

PREVIOUS

REVISIONS – next page
REVISION – allows you to add
1. new quadrats/subplots (as with previous version).
2. Add in a single large transect/macroplot with species and cover data. Plot only has one Quadrat/Subplot (terminology is awkward in this case, but use of a single plot will be clear from the description of Plot Design (i.e. a single plot with no subplots or quadrats).
3. Add in species in Rest of Transect/Plot, but not in one of the quadrats/subplots.
4. Add in nearby species outside the Transect/Plot
5. Specify the cover method used.

E.g. When “RestofPlot is Chosen, it is stored as if were equivalent to a plot. It remains unchecked.
REVISIONS (cont’d)

With this option of adding in additional species, one has to be careful about viewing results.

To get meaningful **quadrat level** data, leave the “Rest of Plot” unchecked. But note that all summary data in the sections entitled “Conservatism-Based Metrics”, “Physiognomic Relative Importance Values,” and “Species Relative Importance Values” do NOT include these “Rest of Plot” Species.

To get meaningful total transect or plot data, make sure the “Rest of Plot” is checked. Now the quadrat data summary, including the average and the standard deviation, still show up, but they will not be meaningful, because “Rest of Plot” is treated as a quadrat.

But all summary Conservatism data in the sections entitled Metrics”, “Physiognomic Relative Importance Values,” and “Species Relative Importance Values” DO include these “Rest of Plot” Species.

Ideally, these summary pages would be clearly labelled as to whether or not only quadrat/subplot data are used, or if additional data are used, but that will take a substantial amount of additional
programming. For now, the website provides greater flexibility for plot and transect based data, but users will need to be careful about how the summary and quadrat data are calculated.

UPLOADING AN FQA DATABASE

PREVIOUS

REVISION: Add in State, Province, and Omernik EPA Region III
Upload New Public FQA Database

Help expand this tool by uploading your region's list of species and their coefficients of conservatism. If you need help, contact us.

1. Enter the FQA Database Details:
   - Region Name: (What region does this database cover?)
   - Year Published: (When was this database originally developed?)
   - Description: (Who or what organization developed this database? Provide a citation of the published source if possible)

   States and/or Provinces: (Select all that apply)
   - Click here to search

   Oceania Level 3 Ecoregions: (Select all that apply)
   - Click here to search

2. Format the spreadsheet to upload:
B. APPENDIX 5. Screen Shots from EcoObs

![Screen Shots from EcoObs Database](image-url)
C. APPENDIX 6. Ecoregional C-values for the Northeast

See Attached Spreadsheet: Northeast FQA_NEIWPC_FINAL Appendix 6_Ecoregional C