The following table was created as a means for straightforward comparison of the existing, “Terrestrial Ecological Systems of the United States” from NatureServe and the RFA application from The Nature Conservancy for Terrestrial Habitat Mapping. Some consideration was made of the existing Nature Conservancy work in the Northeast (NE Terrestrial Habitat Mapping Project) but only when the RFA for the Appalachians was not explicit.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Existing Data (NatureServe) versus RFA (TNC) | | |
|  | **TNC** | **NatureServe** |
| Spatial Resolution | 30m | 30m |
| Spatial Extent | AppLCC boundary | USA |
| Target Scale | Multiple | Meso |
| Cost | 300k | Free |
| Availability | Late 2014 | Now |
| Vegetation Classification |  |  |
| No. of classes for USFWS Region 1 | 193 | 109 |
| Habitat Classification |  |  |
| Considered Habitat Proxy |  |  |
| Structural Components (e.g., canopy cover, % shrub cover) |  |  |
| Rare Endemics Inclusion |  |  |
| SWAP incorporation |  |  |
| NLCD Year | 2006 | 2001/2006 |
| Ground-Truthing |  |  |
| NVC Macrogroupings |  |  |

Judging from this comparison and a cursory review of both the TNC’s NE Project and the NatureServe’s Terrestrial Ecosystems data, it is quickly apparent that TNC’s product is more mature. Ostensibly this is better for end users because the classifications are much more discrete and consider structural factors which are important to habitat suitability. However, after reading the TNC’s technical paper on these data, scarce mention is made to how these structural components were created or incorporated. Further, the critical ground-truthing of these structural components, which would separate this product from the NatureServe product, is noticeably absent.

Two important factors that TNC is offering include; consideration of SWAP habitat classifications and National Heritage Program rare endemic mapping. It is paramount for the Appalachian region to consider these data due to the high level of regional biodiversity and endemism. This will theoretically allow variable-scale analyses which, although lacking with the NatureServe product, is available through other datasets such as the National Vegetation Classification. One obfuscation that should be solved is how TNC plans to ‘coarsen’ the National Heritage Data while maintaining the utility of its inclusion.