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Ecological communities are recognized as both component elements of biological diversity and as representative elements of species populations and habitats and ecological processes. The conceptual bases for alternative approaches to community classification are evaluated in relation to conservation needs at the landscape and subregional scales. Western classification is based on the tradition of potential natural vegetation. Though founded in the discrete community model and the concept of climax vegetation, classification of potential natural vegetation is independent of these views and entirely consistent with continuous community models. Recent modification of concepts concerning classification allow for greater uncertainty regarding seral status and provide for wider acceptance of dynamic systems. Three objectives are identified for plant community conservation: (1) maintain viable representative occurrences of native communities; (2) ensure long-term viability of constituent populations and habitats of species, biotic interactions, and ecological processes; and (3) maintain an ecological reference against which the effects of human activities may be assessed. To effectively meet these objectives at the landscape and subregional scales community classification must: (1) provide a meaningful integration of the environmental factors and ecosystem processes effecting the distribution and abundance of plant and animal species; (2) provide temporal stability; and (3) allow for integration at successively higher geographical scales. A classification of potential natural vegetation, coupled with a classification of seral status and structural condition, is best suited to fill these criteria.