**NASA DEVELOP National Program**

USGS at Colorado State University – Fort Collins, CO

**Fall 2015**

**Colorado Agriculture**

**Subtitle:** Mapping Forest Species Composition at the Colorado State Forest State Park using Landsat 8 with Integrative Spatial Modeling

**VPS Title:** Mapping Forest Species Composition in North-Central Colorado

**Project Team & Partners**

**Project Team:**

Brian Woodward (Project Lead), brdwoodward@gmail.com

Sarah Carroll

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**Advisors & Mentors:**

Dr. Paul Evangelista (Natural Resources Ecology Lab, CSU)

Tony Vorster (Bioenergy Alliance Network of the Rockies)

**Past or Other Contributors:**

Ryan Anderson

**Partner Organizations:**

Bioenergy Alliance Network of the Rockies (BANR), End-User, POC: Tony Vorster

Colorado State Forest Service (CSFS), End-User, POC: John Twitchell

**Project Details**

**Applied Sciences National Applications Addressed:** Agriculture

**Study Area:** CO

**Study Period:** June 2014 & September 2015

**Earth Observations & Parameters:**

Landsat 8, OLI – land cover

**Ancillary Datasets Utilized:**

* Colorado State Forest (CSF) - Management boundaries
* Topographic data - from USGS National Elevation Dataset
* DEVELOP Summer 2015 Term Forest Species Inventory - Plot and species characteristics
* National Agriculture Imagery Program (NAIP) - Imagery for model input bands

**Models Utilized:**

* Shannon Savage (Montana State University) - svm.rf\_10xloop.R
* Shannon Savage (Montana State University) - generic\_ZImodeling\_rinput.txt

**Software Utilized:**

ArcGIS - raster manipulation/analysis, image enhancement & map creation of Landsat 8 OLI

R (RStudio) - Statistical analysis, model application, figure creation

**Project Overview**

This project utilizes NASA Landsat 8 (OLI) imagery in addition to ancillary datasets from fieldwork as inputs into a novel regression tree model to map forest species composition at a fine scale. The primary objective is to bridge the gaps in knowledge of forest species composition in Colorado State Forest State Park and other regional forests. By creating a more thorough and comprehensive record of species distribution, the results of this project will better inform forest management and potential harvesting of bioenergy feedstocks, while simultaneously improving the understanding of the ecological dynamics of forest species distribution.

**Abstract:**

State and National forests are actively managed for a variety of objectives including timber, recreation, wildlife, and grazing. In Colorado, concerns about potential fire severity, aesthetics, and falling dead trees as a result of the recent mountain pine beetle epidemic are shared by our partners at Colorado State Forest Service (CSFS) and communities across the Rocky Mountain region. In addition, the Bioenergy Alliance Network of the Rockies (BANR) is assessing the feasibility of using beetle-kill wood as a source of biofuels. These diverse objectives and concerns highlight the need for current and accurate species composition maps to inform management decisions. Past species composition mapping has shown gaps in the ability to accurately highlight individual species at a fine scale over large forested landscapes, and these maps remain relatively coarse in terms of resolution and their usefulness to forest managers. This project utilizes two recent Landsat 8 (OLI) scenes, forest survey data, and several integrative models developed by researchers at Montana State University in order to create a highly accurate and detailed map of species composition in the Colorado State Forest State Park. Using this combined methodology this project will produce species composition maps for dominant species in Colorado State Forest State Park, including lodgepole pine (*Pinus contorta*), subalpine fir (*Abies lasiocarpa*), Engelmann spruce (*Picea engelmanii*), and aspen (*Populus tremuloides*).

**Community Concerns:**

* The Colorado State Forest State Park is actively managed for timber, recreation, wildlife, and grazing. An accurate and up-to-date map of species composition is needed to manage for this diverse range of objectives. A map of species composition can be used as a baseline for past and future ecological studies. Additionally, communities in the Rocky Mountains are concerned about potential severe fires, aesthetics, and falling dead trees as a result of the recent mountain pine beetle epidemic.
* In 2014, over 890,000 acres of Colorado forests were impacted by insect or disease activity. Species composition data are becoming an increasingly informative management tool in areas of bark beetle outbreak, as forest recovery trajectories are often dependent upon pre-outbreak species composition. These same data can aide foresters in identifying areas susceptible to severe outbreaks as well as with predicting future spread.
* The Bioenergy Alliance Network of the Rockies (BANR) is assessing the feasibility of using beetle-kill wood as a feedstock for biofuels. A map of species composition could be used by BANR to map live and dead biomass as they assess the location and quantity of potential feedstock for biofuel.

**Current Management Practices & Policies:**

The Colorado State Forest Service has an adaptive and active management strategy that requires accurate and current data to inform management decisions. Presently, these decisions are based primarily on historical records, field observations, and National Agricultural Imagery Program (NAIP) imagery. The Colorado State Forest Service does have a species composition map of State Forest State Park; however, the map is inaccurate because it used outdated technology for the mapping process, and the map has not been revised over time. These datasets are not sufficient to provide a forest-wide, accurate map detailing forest species composition, which is important for understanding forest health, potential for insect infestation, and allotments for timber harvests.

**Decision Support Tools & Benefits:**

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| End-Product | Earth Observations Used | Benefit & Impact |
| Maps depicting location of specific forest species within Colorado State Forest State Park | Landsat 8 OLI | These visualizations will assist partners in recognizing potential locations for profitable and ecologically sustainable bioenergy feedstock harvesting, in addition to species-specific pest outbreak monitoring. |
| A tutorial describing simplified steps for imagery pre-processing and running of the Zero-Inflated model in R | Landsat 8 OLI | A step-by-step tutorial will help partners and future model users to better navigate the model inputs and parameters, allowing for the expedited use of the model. |
| Interactive ArcGIS Online (AGOL) dataset and story map of species composition process, end-results and benefits to partners and community | Landsat 8 OLI | This will allow partners to access data visualizations online as well as providing an informative story map layout explaining the specific benefits of the map product to potential future partners and to educate the general public. |

**Project Imagery**

[Coming Soon!]

Caption: [Coming Soon!] Image Credit: Colorado Agriculture Team.

Image: File Name (Please submit your image as a separate .jpeg as well as inserting it in this document)