Quick Guide to Nomenclature for your Forest Stewardship Plan

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There is a lot of confusion about how to present written names of tree and shrub species. Ultimately it's not terribly critical. However, following these tips will help you "write like a pro" when preparing your stewardship plan. Above all, try to at least be consistent in your nomenclature.

To capitalize or not to capitalize?

In general, common names of species should not be capitalized, unless at the beginning of a sentence. The exception is when the name includes a proper noun.

Examples where not to capitalize:

- red alder
- grand fir
- western hemlock
- lodgepole pine
- salmonberry
- thimbleberry
- sword fern

Examples where to capitalize:

- Douglas-fir
- Sitka spruce
- Pacific dogwood
- Oregon ash

Special syntax

Note the specific syntax for these species:

- Douglas-fir (should have a hyphen)
- western redcedar (redcedar should be one word)
- bigleaf maple (bigleaf should be one word)

Scientific names

One of the drawbacks to common names is that some species have more than one common name (e.g., Garry oak vs. Oregon white oak) and some common names are used for multiple species (e.g. “white fir” can refer to *Abies grandis* or *Abies concolor*). An advantage of scientific names is that there is no ambiguity. That said, using common names in your stewardship plan is just fine—you do not need to use scientific names. If you want to get fancy and use them, though, here’s how you should do it:

- Put the scientific name in parentheses only after the first use of the common name in the text (you do not need to do it for subsequent uses, as you have now defined exactly what you are referring to with a given common name).
- Put the scientific name in italics.
- The genus (first part) should always be capitalized, while the species name should be lower case.

Example: “This stand is dominated by western redcedar (*Thuja plicata*)…”

Other Tips

Compose vs. comprise

A common error is to use comprise instead of compose. Comprise means “is composed of.” The whole comprises the parts, and the parts compose the whole. Quick tip – if there is an “is” in front of it, it should be compose and not comprise.

- Correct: Stand 1 comprises a mix of mature Douglas-fir and western hemlock.
- Correct: Stand 1 is composed of mature Douglas-fir and western hemlock.
- Incorrect: Stand 1 is comprised of mature Douglas-fir and western hemlock.

Insure vs. Ensure

Another common error is to use insure when it should be ensure. Insure is what you do for your house and car. Ensure means to make sure. Sometimes there is confusion with assure as well. Here is a sentence that uses all three correctly: “I assure you that I will ensure that the car is insured.”