The Forest CoverType dataset

1. Title of Database:

Forest Covertype data

2. Sources:

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NOTE: Reuse of this database is unlimited with retention of
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3. Past Usage:

Blackard, Jock A. and Denis J. Dean. 2000. "Comparative
Accuracies of Artificial Neural Networks and Discriminant
Analysis in Predicting Forest Cover Types from Cartographic
Variables." Computers and Electronics in Agriculture
24(3):131-151.

Blackard, Jock A. and Denis J. Dean. 1998. "Comparative
Accuracies of Neural Networks and Discriminant Analysis
in Predicting Forest Cover Types from Cartographic
Variables." Second Southern Forestry GIS Conference.
University of Georgia. Athens, GA. Pages 189-199.

Blackard, Jock A. 1998. "Comparison of Neural Networks and
Discriminant Analysis in Predicting Forest Cover Types."
Ph.D. dissertation. Department of Forest Sciences.

Colorado State University. Fort Collins, Colorado. 165 pages.

Abstract of dissertation:

Natural resource managers responsible for developing ecosystem management strategies require basic descriptive information including inventory data for forested lands to support their decision-making processes. However, managers generally do not have this type of data for inholdings or neighboring lands that are outside their immediate jurisdiction. One method of obtaining this information is through the use of predictive models.

Two predictive models were examined in this study, a feedforward neural network model and a more traditional statistical model based on discriminant analysis. The overall objectives of this research were to first construct these two predictive models, and second to compare and evaluate their respective classification accuracies when predicting forest cover types in undisturbed forests.

The study area included four wilderness areas found in the Roosevelt National Forest of northern Colorado. A total of twelve cartographic measures were utilized as independent variables in the predictive models, while seven major forest cover types were used as dependent variables. Several subsets of these variables were examined to determine the best overall predictive model.

For each subset of cartographic variables examined in this study, relative classification accuracies indicate the neural network approach outperformed the traditional discriminant analysis method in predicting forest cover types. The final neural network model had a higher absolute classification accuracy (70.58%) than the final corresponding linear discriminant analysis model(58.38%). In support of these classification results, thirty additional networks with randomly selected initial weights were derived. From these networks, the overall mean absolute classification accuracy for the neural network method was 70.52%, with a 95% confidence interval of 70.26% to 70.80%. Consequently, natural resource managers may utilize an alternative method of predicting forest cover types that is both superior to the traditional statistical methods and adequate to support their decision-making processes for developing ecosystem management strategies.

-- Classification performance
- -- first 11,340 records used for training data subset
- -- next 3,780 records used for validation data subset
- -- last 565,892 records used for testing data subset
- -- 70% Neural Network (backpropagation)
- -- 58% Linear Discriminant Analysis

4. Relevant Information Paragraph:

Predicting forest cover type from cartographic variables only (no remotely sensed data). The actual forest cover type for a given observation (30 x 30 meter cell) was determined from US Forest Service (USFS) Region 2 Resource Information System (RIS) data. Independent variables were derived from data originally obtained from US Geological Survey (USGS) and USFS data. Data is in raw form (not scaled) and contains binary (0 or 1) columns of data for qualitative independent variables (wilderness areas and soil types).

This study area includes four wilderness areas located in the

Roosevelt National Forest of northern Colorado. These areas represent forests with minimal human-caused disturbances, so that existing forest cover types are more a result of ecological processes rather than forest management practices.

Some background information for these four wilderness areas: Neota (area 2) probably has the highest mean elevational value of the 4 wilderness areas. Rawah (area 1) and Comanche Peak (area 3) would have a lower mean elevational value, while Cache la Poudre (area 4) would have the lowest mean elevational value.

As for primary major tree species in these areas, Neota would have spruce/fir (type 1), while Rawah and Comanche Peak would probably have lodgepole pine (type 2) as their primary species, followed by spruce/fir and aspen (type 5). Cache la Poudre would tend to have Ponderosa pine (type 3), Douglas-fir (type 6), and cottonwood/willow (type 4).

The Rawah and Comanche Peak areas would tend to be more typical of the overall dataset than either the Neota or Cache la Poudre, due to their assortment of tree species and range of predictive variable values (elevation, etc.) Cache la Poudre would probably be more unique than the others, due to its relatively low elevation range and species composition.

5. Number of instances (observations): 581,012

6. Number of Attributes: 12 measures, but 54 columns of data (10 quantitative variables, 4 binary wilderness areas and 40 binary soil type variables)

7. Attribute information:

Given is the attribute name, attribute type, the measurement unit and a brief description. The forest cover type is the classification problem. The order of this listing corresponds to the order of numerals along the rows of the database.

Name	Data Type	Measurement	Description
Elevation	quantitative	meters	Elevation in meters
Aspect	quantitative	azimuth	Aspect in degrees azimuth
Slope	quantitative	degrees	Slope in degrees
Horizontal_Distance_To_Hydrology	quantitative	meters	Horz Dist to nearest surface water features
Vertical_Distance_To_Hydrology	quantitative	meters	Vert Dist to nearest surface water features
Horizontal_Distance_To_Roadways	quantitative	meters	Horz Dist to nearest roadway
Hillshade_9am	quantitative	0 to 255 index	Hillshade index at 9am, summer solstice
Hillshade_Noon	quantitative	0 to 255 index	Hillshade index at noon, summer soltice
Hillshade_3pm	quantitative	0 to 255 index	Hillshade index at 3pm, summer solstice
Horizontal_Distance_To_Fire_Points	quantitative	meters	Horz Dist to nearest wildfire ignition points

Wilderness_Area (4 binary columns)	qualitative	0 (absence) or 1 (presence)
Wilderness area designation		
Soil_Type (40 binary columns)	qualitative	0 (absence) or 1 (presence)
Soil Type designation		
Cover_Type (7 types)	integer	1 to 7
Forest Cover Type designation		

Code Designations:

Wilderness Areas:
1 -- Rawah Wilderness Area
2 -- Neota Wilderness Area
3 -- Comanche Peak Wilderness Area
4 -- Cache la Poudre Wilderness Area

Soil Types: 1 to 40 : based on the USFS Ecological Landtype Units (ELUs) for this study area:

Study Code	USFS ELU Code	Description
1	2702	Cathedral family - Rock outcrop complex, extremely stony.
2	2703	Vanet - Ratake families complex, very stony.
3	2704	Haploborolis - Rock outcrop complex, rubbly.
4	2705	Ratake family - Rock outcrop complex, rubbly.
5	2706	Vanet family - Rock outcrop complex complex, rubbly.
6	2717	Vanet - Wetmore families - Rock outcrop complex, stony.
7	3501	Gothic family.
8	3502	Supervisor - Limber families complex.
9	4201	Troutville family, very stony.
10	4703	Bullwark - Catamount families - Rock outcrop complex, rubbly.
11	4704	Bullwark - Catamount families - Rock land complex, rubbly.
12	4744	Legault family - Rock land complex, stony.
13	4758	Catamount family - Rock land - Bullwark family complex, rubbly.
14	5101	Pachic Argiborolis - Aquolis complex.
15	5151	unspecified in the USFS Soil and ELU Survey.
16	6101	Cryaquolis - Cryoborolis complex.
17	6102	Gateview family - Cryaquolis complex.
18	6731	Rogert family, very stony.
19	7101	Typic Cryaquolis - Borohemists complex.
20	7102	Typic Cryaquepts - Typic Cryaquolls complex.
21	7103	Typic Cryaquolls - Leighcan family, till substratum complex.
22	7201	Leighcan family, till substratum, extremely bouldery.
23	7202	Leighcan family, till substratum - Typic Cryaquolls complex.
24	7700	Leighcan family, extremely stony.
25	7701	Leighcan family, warm, extremely stony.
26	7702	Granile - Catamount families complex, very stony.
27	7709	Leighcan family, warm - Rock outcrop complex, extremely stony.
28	7710	Leighcan family - Rock outcrop complex, extremely stony.
29	7745	Como - Legault families complex, extremely stony.
30	7746	Como family - Rock land - Legault family complex, extremely stony.
31	7755	Leighcan - Catamount families complex, extremely stony.
32	7756	Catamount family - Rock outcrop - Leighcan family complex, extremely stony.
33	7757	Leighcan - Catamount families - Rock outcrop complex, extremely stony.
34	7790	Cryorthents - Rock land complex, extremely stony.
35	8703	Cryumbrepts - Rock outcrop - Cryaquepts complex.

36	8707	Bross family - Rock land - Cryumbrepts complex, extremely stony.
37	8708	Rock outcrop - Cryumbrepts - Cryorthents complex, extremely stony.
38	8771	Leighcan - Moran families - Cryaquolls complex, extremely stony.
39	8772	Moran family - Cryorthents - Leighcan family complex, extremely stony.
40	8776	Moran family - Cryorthents - Rock land complex, extremely stony.

Note: First digit: climatic zone

1. lower montane dry
2. lower montane
3. montane dry
4. montane
5. montane dry and montane
6. montane and subalpine
7. subalpine
8. alpine

Second digit: geologic zones

1. alluvium
2. glacial
3. shale
4. sandstone
5. mixed sedimentary
6. unspecified in the USFS ELU Survey
7. igneous and metamorphic
8. volcanic

The third and fourth ELU digits are unique to the mapping unit and have no special meaning to the climatic or geologic zones.

Forest Cover Type Classes:

1 -- Spruce/Fir
2 -- Lodgepole Pine
3 -- Ponderosa Pine
4 -- Cottonwood/Willow
5 -- Aspen
6 -- Douglas-fir
7 -- Krummholz

8. Basic Summary Statistics for quantitative variables only (whole dataset -- thanks to Phil Rennert for the summary values):

Name	Units	Mean	Std Dev
Elevation	meters	2959.36	279.98
Aspect	azimuth	155.65	111.91
Slope	degrees	14.10	7.49
Horizontal_Distance_To_Hydrology	meters	269.43	212.55
Vertical_Distance_To_Hydrology	meters	46.42	58.30
Horizontal_Distance_To_Roadways	meters	2350.15	1559.25
Hillshade_9am	0 to 255 index	212.15	26.77
Hillshade_Noon	0 to 255 index	223.32	19.77
Hillshade_3pm	0 to 255 index	142.53	38.27
Horizontal_Distance_To_Fire_Points	meters	1980.29	1324.19

9. Missing Attribute Values: None.

10. Class distribution:

Number of records of Spruce-Fir:	211840
Number of records of Lodgepole Pine:	283301
Number of records of Ponderosa Pine:	35754
Number of records of Cottonwood/Willow:	2747
Number of records of Aspen:	9493
Number of records of Douglas-fir:	17367
Number of records of Krummholz:	20510
Number of records of other:	0
Total records:	581012

Jock A. Blackard
08/28/1998 -- original text
12/07/1999 -- updated mailing address, citations, background info
for study area, added summary statistics.