

Preface

This book emerged from sharing a sticky, cinnamon-covered funnel cake while sitting on the grass in a park in Boulder City, Nevada. We, Karel and Lawrence, were scheming about new ways to work together and we agreed that a long-standing challenge in succession research was the lack of generalization at broader spatial scales. What if we could find a few basic ways to compare enough studies from many disturbances and biomes? Would that help unwind the numerous threads of successional research that, like the strings of our funnel cake, seemed hopelessly tangled? With the enthusiastic support of our wives, we decided to tackle the challenge to search for possible patterns among the thousands of studies of succession. We were encouraged by our recent paper (Prach & Walker, 2019) that showed clear latitudinal trends, following mining and abandoned fields, in what we call the success of succession, or the return to a study's local potential natural vegetation. Were such patterns the first glimpses to a more robust generalization? This book thus represents both the first comprehensive survey of plant succession in nearly two decades as well as the first attempt at global comparisons of terrestrial succession among all major disturbances and biomes. We encourage you to dip into it to see how we fared.

Plant succession is a central theme in ecology that focuses on temporal dynamics. Yet, despite the large number of site-specific studies, there is a lack of comparative studies on succession that consider broad geographical scales. In our research careers, we have attempted to address this imbalance.

Another aspect of succession that concerns us both is its applicability to practical issues of conservation and restoration. We see restoration as the deliberate manipulation of succession to a desired goal. We also have found that often well-intentioned manipulations are counterproductive to achieving a desirable endpoint, particularly if principles of ecological succession are not understood. Thus we hope that this book will be

useful not only to academic ecologists but also to practically oriented people including conservationists and restorationists.

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