

Web Soil Survey

A Users Guide Series

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How to Find WSS Online

Finding Web Soil Survey is as simple as typing it into any search engine. It is typically the first link on the results page, but if you are unsure just look for the "usda.gov" at the end of the hyperlink. Once you are there click on the green button to get started!



- History of Soil Surveys
- How to Find WSS Online
- Future Articles in this Series

What is Web Soil Survey? How it can be of Benefit to You



FUTURE ARTICLES IN THIS SERIES

Coming up in this series will be how soil surveys are made, the basic steps in how to use WSS along with what tools could be useful to you. I can attest to the best way to learn how to use this powerful resource is to explore and play with it. These articles will be geared toward giving you an understanding of the basics to better help you navigate, operate and evaluate results.

Every once in a while we will get someone who walks into the office looking for soil information for their property. Whether their intent is agriculture or construction information or just curiosity we always point them to Web Soil Survey (WSS).

Not a lot of folks know what WSS is so to start off let's get a better understanding of soils surveys. To do that we should first look into their history and how they came about. The soil survey effort began in the United States in 1899. The Soil Conservation Service (SCS), now called Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), was designated lead agency. The SCS was assigned responsibility for mapping all privately owned land in the Nation. Publicly owned land falls under the responsibility of the respective managing agency. In the 1950s, the National Cooperative Soil Survey (NCSS) was formed. The NCSS consists of NRCS (lead agency), partners (including other Federal land management agencies such as the United States Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and the National Park Service), State Agricultural Experiment Stations, and local governmental entities. More than 95 percent of privately owned land has been surveyed and 92 percent of all land has been surveyed.

In the late 1960s, digital records were created for soil properties and interpretations of the various soil types identified in soil surveys. In the mid-1980s, a state-by-state database of these records was then developed. In 1994, the current NASIS (National Soil Information System) transactional database was implemented in each state.

Also, digitizing of soil maps began during this time. In the mid-1990s, a more concentrated effort was begun to digitize all the completed soil maps for the Nation with unmapped areas being digitized as they are mapped, as part of the ongoing mapping effort.

In 2000, the NASIS databases were combined into a national centralized database. Late in 2003, the Soil Data Warehouse and Soil Data Mart were established to house all official soil survey data. The Soil Data Warehouse stores various versions of the data dating from 2003, while the Soil Data Mart makes only the current version of data available for distribution to a wide-ranging list of customers, including the general public.

In 2005, Web Soil Survey (WSS) was brought online to provide public access to, and online viewing of, information in the Soil Data Mart. The information in a soil survey can be used by farmers and ranchers to help determine whether a particular soil type is suited for crops or livestock and what type of soil management might be required. An architect or engineer might use the engineering properties of a soil to determine whether it is suitable for a certain type of construction. A homeowner may even use the information for maintaining or constructing their garden, yard, or home.

Now that we know the history, the next article will be focused more on how the surveys are made.



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