Part 601 – National Cooperative Soil Survey Organization

Subpart A – General Information

601.0 Definition

A. The National Cooperative Soil Survey (NCSS) is a nationwide partnership of Federal, regional, State, and local agencies and private entities and institutions. This partnership works to cooperatively investigate, inventory, document, classify, interpret, disseminate, and publish information about soils of the United States and its trust territories and commonwealths. The activities of the NCSS are carried out on national, regional (such as the major land resource area, or MLRA), and State levels.

B. NRCS is responsible for the leadership of soil survey activities of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, for the leadership and coordination of NCSS activities, and for the extension of soil survey technology to global applications. Additional information about the Soil Survey Program is in the NRCS general manual (http://directives.sc.egov.usda.gov/RollupViewer.aspx?hid=16988) under Title 430, Part 402.

C. Primary Federal agency NCSS participants include the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Department of Defense (DoD), Forest Service (FS), National Park Service (NPS), and NRCS. Part 601, subpart B, section 601.10, has a short description of the roles of these partners. In addition to these Federal agency partners, there are numerous State and local partners participating in the NCSS. Information about the organization and responsibilities of partner agencies is contained in their policy documents.

601.1 NRCS Organization and Responsibilities

A. This section provides information about many of the responsibilities of various offices within NRCS as they pertain to the National Cooperative Soil Survey Program.

B. NCSS Responsibilities of the Soil Survey Office (SSO)

(1) Conducting an inventory and assessment of existing soil survey and ecological site information to identify deficiencies and make recommendations for improvement
(2) Developing a long-range plan and associated project plans for updating soil survey and ecological site information in the MLRA soil survey area
(3) Managing the soil survey and ecological site activities, including fieldwork, correlation, the National Soil Information System (NASIS) database, and geospatial information within the MLRA soil survey area
(4) Supervising and training staff members
(5) Controlling the quality of all phases of the soil survey and ecological site activities to ensure they meet NCSS standards
(6) Conducting progressive correlation during the course of all survey activities
(7) Ensuring seamless soil survey products across political and physiographic boundaries in the survey area
(8) Providing leadership for the technical team by identifying survey update needs and carrying out the completion of priority projects (see part 608, section 608.1G)
(9) Preparing for quality assurance reviews conducted by the soil survey regional office (SSR)
(10) Ensuring that findings and recommendations identified in the SSR quality assurance reviews are addressed and implemented in a timely manner
(11) Preparing drafts of official soil series descriptions (OSDs) and ecological site descriptions (ESDs)

C. NCSS Responsibilities of the Resource Soil Scientist

(1) Assisting the State soil scientist with the development, coordination, and maintenance of field office technical guides and soil interpretations
(2) Conducting onsite soils investigations according to agency authorities
(3) Evaluating and assisting field offices in maintaining the official soil survey information
(4) Coordinating with the soil survey office and State office to make any needed changes in the official soil survey data
(5) Providing assistance in the use of soil information for the implementation of NRCS programs
(6) Providing interdisciplinary advice and expertise to solve resource problems
(7) Assisting with special soil studies, including collecting additional site and soil information on the performance and behavior of correlated soil map units
(8) Training NRCS staffs and the public to understand and utilize soil survey data and information
(9) Assisting the State soil scientist with the development and dissemination of soil information and in promoting soil survey
(10) Assisting the State soil scientist in evaluating the adequacy of existing soil survey maps, data, and interpretations through participation on the SSO technical team

D. NCSS Responsibilities of the State Soil Scientist

(1) Providing technical soil services to other staffs and leadership to resource soil scientists
(2) Developing cooperative relationships to enhance the funding, progress, use, and understanding of soil surveys
(3) Serving as the primary liaison to State NCSS cooperators, including hosting an annual meeting to evaluate and document soil survey needs and make recommendations for soil survey and ecological site activities
(4) Planning and prioritizing activities of technical soil services
(5) Periodically hosting the regional or national NCSS conference
(6) Documenting the needs for updating soil survey maps, data, and interpretations
(7) Serve as a member of the management team(s) for the SSRs serving the State (refer to part 608, section 608.1F)
(8) Assisting soil survey users in understanding and applying soil survey information
(9) Coordinating the development of localized soil interpretations
(10) Marketing soil survey information
(11) Providing statewide leadership in the application and use of soil survey information, including general soil maps, geomorphic maps, and block diagrams
(12) Ensuring the technical content, coordination, and quality of soil information in the field office technical guides
(13) Providing advice and expertise on soil-related issues to all NRCS conservation programs
(14) Posting updated soil survey data to the Soil Data Warehouse
(15) Assisting in national soil program initiatives
(16) Interpreting and distributing a State subset of the NASIS data
(17) Providing leadership in identifying the need for new soil survey information and interpretations within the State
(18) Providing leadership for the development of new soil survey applications, technology, and information delivery within the State

E. NCSS Responsibilities of the State Conservationist (STC)

(1) Serving (or designating someone to serve) on the Board of Advisors to provide advice, counsel, and broad management direction to the soil survey regional director and

management team to ensure soil survey operations and ecological site activities are relevant to agency goals, priorities, and conservation needs

(2) Reviewing the progress and performance of soil survey and ecological site activities in the region in relation to agency goals and priorities and provide feedback to the associate director for soil operations for consideration during periodic performance reviews and annual evaluations of soil survey regional directors

(3) Reviewing and concurring with management team recommendations on project priorities for soil survey and ecological site activities, ensuring that local needs are in balance with State and national issues, or providing alternate advice

F. NCSS Responsibilities of the Soil Survey Regional Office (SSR)

(1) Providing leadership in the production and quality assurance of soil survey and ecological site information

(2) Convening the annual meetings or teleconferences of the Board of Advisors

(3) Developing standard operating procedures for the soil survey region that outline the responsibilities and specifications for conducting soil surveys and ecological site activities

(4) Planning and managing the SSR activities in cooperation with State soil scientists, cooperators, and other stakeholders

(5) Coordinating with National Soil Survey Center (NSSC) soil scientists and other disciplines, as appropriate, to maintain and improve soil surveys

(6) Securing technical advice, expertise, and review from other disciplines for soil interpretations and technical reports

(7) Providing technical support and guidance to soil survey offices

(8) Conducting quality assurance reviews

(9) Providing supplemental training in all aspects of soil survey operations as may be needed (beyond that provided by the Soil Science Division) to soil survey office staffs through technical notes, onsite visits, workshops, and similar activities

(10) Providing quality assurance for NASIS, OSDs and ESDs, the Soil Survey Geographic (SSURGO) database, the Digital General Soil Map of the United States (STATSGO2) database, and technical reports

(11) Developing soil correlation documents for initial soil surveys

(12) Maintaining the national OSD and soil classification (SC) databases for soil series mapped in the region

(13) Providing MLRA-specific correlation guidelines for technical issues, such as soil temperature and moisture regimes and their associated ecological zones and vegetation, and any other MLRA-specific information

(14) Providing leadership for the coordinated collection of soil characterization data and investigations in the region related to soil survey

(15) Providing leadership in collecting, analyzing, and interpreting soil performance and characterization data

(16) Coordinating proposed revisions to boundaries of major land resource areas with States and the NSSC

G. NCSS Responsibilities of the National Technology Support Center Core Team Soil Scientist

(1) Providing assistance to States and soil survey regional offices in developing and implementing strategies to coordinate and deliver soil survey data and interpretations to meet specific program needs, such as ranking systems and eligibility criteria for the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

(2) Providing technical assistance and guidance in developing interpretive criteria to meet State's specialized interpretive needs

(3) Promoting the use and integration of soil survey information in public and program policies

H. NCSS Responsibilities of the National Soil Survey Center

(1) Providing leadership in the development of guidelines, standards, and procedures for all technical phases of NCSS work
(2) Maintaining and improving the scientific basis for the NCSS program
(3) Maintaining national soil survey standards, which are contained in the National Soil Survey Handbook, Soil Survey Manual, Soil Taxonomy, Soil Survey Laboratory Methods Manual, and other topical handbooks for mapping, classification, interpretation, investigation, laboratory analysis, and data management
(4) Developing and maintaining the National Ecological Site Handbook
(5) Assisting international, national, SSR, State, and soil survey office staffs in soil survey and ecological site activities
(6) Coordinating with the National Employee Development Center to plan and deliver training for the Soil Science Division, including training in soil survey procedures, soil classification, pedology, geomorphic principles and application, interpretations, investigations, soil survey project management, technical soil services, ecological site inventory, and data management
(7) Supplementing basic soil survey information with laboratory and field data on the properties and behavior of soils
(8) Providing liaisons to each of the NCSS regional conferences

I. NCSS Responsibilities of the Geospatial Research Unit, National Soil Survey Center

(1) Promoting partnerships with educational institutions, private industry, and government agencies to research and develop technologies that will enhance the production and utilization of soil information
(2) Addressing future soil information dissemination in partnership with the National Geospatial Center of Excellence by developing technologies to support distribution
(3) Implementing functional user-friendly applications by delivering them to the appropriate functional unit for their use

J. NCSS Responsibilities of National Headquarters

(1) Formulating national policies regarding the Soil Survey Program and Ecological Site Program
(2) Formulating policy regarding the integration of technical soil services within NRCS and with other agencies
(3) Representing NRCS agency interests to the NCSS
(4) Providing leadership for the Federal part of the NCSS
(5) Chairing and coordinating the NCSS and its activities
(6) Developing and maintaining relationships and contacts with NCSS cooperators
(7) Developing soil science-related policies, procedures, and implementation strategies for maintaining and coordinating States' Field Office Technical Guides, with primary emphasis on section II
(8) Developing, reviewing, and recommending program policy
(9) Providing technical expertise to the Agricultural Research Service, university research stations, and others in the use and application of soils and soil survey information for the development of environmental models such as RUSLE2, WEPS, WIN-PST, WEPP, and EPIC
(10) Providing technical expertise to task forces, committees, and work groups dealing with natural resource issues, such as air, water, and soil quality, and related legal, social, and policy concerns