

Part 601 – National Cooperative Soil Survey Organization

Subpart B – Appendix

601.10 Primary Federal Partners

A. This subpart provides brief descriptions of the roles of the five primary Federal partners in NCSS. Descriptions were prepared in 2006 by representatives of each agency. The most current information is contained in each agency's own policy documents.

B. Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA)

BIA is the primary contact for soil surveys on the 93.7 million acres of Native American lands. Soil surveys are primarily at 1:24,000 scale to support decision-making processes for land management. Soil surveys are needed for farming, community planning, land development, and grazing and forest management. Soil survey and ecological site data are necessary for land health assessments, grazing permit renewal, energy and mineral permitting and leasing, restoration of natural fire processes, restoration of the health of the land, maintenance of clean water and air, and invasive plant control. Soil information is fundamental in assessing soil capabilities, limitations, and vulnerability to degradation and loss of capacity so that the health of the land can be sustained. Because Native American lands are considered private lands, NRCS has the responsibility to complete soil surveys on Native American lands. Soil surveys are completed in conjunction with BIA soil scientists and other staff.

C. Bureau of Land Management (BLM)

(1) BLM manages approximately 261 million acres of public land, located primarily in 12 western States. The mission of BLM is to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of public land for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations. BLM-administered land include a diverse mosaic of grassland, shrub land, forest, desert, and arctic and alpine ecosystems on extensive landscapes that range from nearly level playas to steep, rugged mountains. These landscapes and ecosystems contain a wide variety of soils with diverse properties that can significantly affect use and management. BLM manages a wide variety of resources and uses, including energy and minerals, livestock forage, fish and wildlife habitat, timber, wild horse and burro populations, watershed values, wilderness and recreation areas, and cultural and other natural heritage values. BLM administers public land within a framework of numerous laws and regulations, including FLPMA, NEPA, and State water-quality laws. Soils are one of the most fundamental natural resources on public land. Soils sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the land. Soil quality and health are the driving forces that determine these factors.

(2) Soil surveys are primarily at 1:24,000 scale to support decision-making processes for land management. Soil survey and ecological site data are necessary for rangeland health assessments, grazing permit renewal, energy and mineral permitting and leasing, restoration of natural fire processes, restoration of the health of the land, maintenance of clean water and air, and invasive plant control. Soil information is fundamental in assessing soil capabilities, limitations, and vulnerability to degradation and loss of capacity so that the health of the land can be sustained. The information and interpretations provided in soil surveys are helpful in managing all activities on public land that disturb the soil. Most soil and ecological mapping on public land has been accomplished through reimbursable agreements with NRCS.

D. Department of Defense (DoD)

- (1) DoD manages about 50 million acres and is divided into five main agencies. The Army has about 17 million acres of mission land, the Air Force has about 9 million acres, the Navy has about 2 million acres, the Marine Corps has about 1 million acres, and the Army Corps of Engineers has about 15 million acres. The remainder is divided up by smaller agencies.
- (2) DoD has two missions on its installations. The first mission is to train soldiers, marines, airmen, and sailors in conditions as close as possible to those under which they may have to fight. The second mission is to manage the conservation of natural resources. Managing the conservation of natural resources allows for the first mission.
- (3) The Sikes Act, as amended, requires each component service (Army, Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps) to have an integrated natural resources management plan (INRMP) for each installation and training site that has significant natural resources. The INRMP describes the installation's natural resources and its management strategy for sustaining them while supporting the installation's military mission.
- (4) Each service's natural resources management implementing guidelines require a soil planning-level survey as part of an installation's INRMP. A soil planning-level survey is equivalent to an NCSS soil survey product at an order-2 level of detail. Each service either names NRCS as the source from which to obtain soils data or requires that the soil survey be done according to NCSS standards and procedures. Each installation's mission normally dictates the level of detail needed. The Army's standard is a 1:12,000-scale soil survey to support installations where millions of miles are used for land-intensive mission training, including vehicle use (from ATVs to main battle tanks). On installations that DoD is closing, those involved in clean-up efforts often require order-2 soil surveys to understand the effects of chemicals and constituents of concern and how to safely manage their transport. Installations that need a soil survey enter into an agreement with NRCS through the SSRs in which the installation is located. At the installation's request, the soil survey may be restricted from public access due to national security concerns.

E. Forest Service (FS)

- (1) The national forests (formerly called forest reserves) originated with the Forest Reserve Act of 1891, which allowed the President to establish forest reserves from timber-covered public domain land. National forests and grasslands encompass 193 million acres of land. There are 155 national forests and 20 grasslands. Congress established the Forest Service to provide quality water and timber for the Nation's benefit. The Forest Service manages national forests for multiple uses (including recreation) and benefits and for the sustained yield of renewable resources such as water, forage, wildlife, and wood. Managing for multiple uses means managing resources under the best combination of uses to benefit the American people while ensuring the productivity of the land and protecting the quality of the environment.
- (2) The National Forest System uses soil resource inventories and terrestrial ecological unit inventories to develop land and resource management plans as well as project plans. The Forest Service pursues an ecological approach to land stewardship. This approach has increased the need for soil resource inventories to collect and classify vegetation data in conjunction with progressive inventories. Soil surveys in the eastern United States have been completed primarily through agreements with NRCS. In the western States, soil surveys are typically completed by Forest Service staff.

F. National Park Service (NPS)

- (1) NPS is the steward for natural resources on nearly 85 million acres of public land. Management policies and guidelines for soil resource management are contained in NPS-77, Natural Resources Management. The NPS management policies state: "The NPS will actively seek to understand and preserve the soil resources of parks and to prevent, to the extent possible, the unnatural erosion, physical removal, or contamination of the soil, or its

- contamination of other resources.” The NPS Soil Inventory and Monitoring Program uses the appropriate detailed geospatial soil databases to define the distribution of soil types; determine their physical, chemical, and biological characteristics; provide interpretations needed to assess soil capabilities, limitations, and vulnerabilities to degradation; promote a soil conservation ethic; and support soil resources management, vital signs monitoring, ecological restoration activities, and agency decisions on the development of facilities.
- (2) Soil management objectives are to—
- (i) Preserve intact, functioning, natural systems by preserving native soils and the processes of soil genesis in a condition undisturbed by humans.
 - (ii) Maintain significant cultural objects and scenes by conserving soils in a manner consistent with the associated historic practices and by minimizing soil erosion to the extent possible.
 - (iii) Protect property and provide safety by ensuring that developments and their management take into account soil limitations, behavior, and hazards.
 - (iv) Minimize soil loss and disturbance caused by special use activities and ensure that soils retain their productivity and potential for reclamation. NPS typically works with NRCS, through interagency agreements, to support soil survey crews, which map NPS lands as well as refine or develop ecological site descriptions to meet agency needs.