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For immediate release

## **DIGITIZATION OF NORTH DAKOTA SOIL MAPS COMPLETED**

BISMARCK – A cooperative federal-state project to convert all of North Dakota’s soil surveys to a digital format has been finished years ahead of schedule and under budget.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the North Dakota Geological Survey and North Dakota Agriculture Commissioner Roger Johnson announced Wednesday that the Soil Survey Geographical Database (SSURGO) is now available at [www.nd.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/soils.html](http://www.nd.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/soils.html) and will soon be available on the state’s website.

“The timely completion of this project is due in large part to the cooperation of several federal and state agencies, as well as private contractors,” said NRCS State Conservationist J.R. Flores. “They saw the importance of this project and worked together to make it happen.”

“What once took up more than six feet of tightly packed bookshelf can now fit on a handful of CD-ROMs,” said Johnson. “Best of all, the digital format means that the maps can be readily updated and are available on the Internet.”

North Dakota is the fourth state to complete its soil survey database.

Soil surveys are inventories of the soil resources of a county or other specific area. Each survey includes a soil map, descriptions of soils and soil map units, and predictions (interpretations) of soil behavior for different uses and management.

“This is cutting edge technology for producers to make planting and tillage decisions,” said Johnson, who noted that the North Dakota Department of Agriculture and North Dakota State University have developed a program to use soil surveys to determine soil sensitivity to pesticides.

The surveys are extensively used by government agencies, notably NRCS and soil conservation districts, in determining appropriate conservation measures. Increasingly, soil surveys are used to determine the taxable valuation of land.

The system will let us overlay other geographic data, such as drought information, hydrology, land use, vegetation and geology on the soils layer and prioritize our conservation efforts where the need is greatest, “ said Jennifer Heglund, assistant state conservationist. “We can make wiser and more informed decisions.”

The first soil surveys in North Dakota were made near the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In 1990, the North Dakota State Conservation Committee began digitizing surveys, and in

1997, the North Dakota Geological Survey took over the project. Initially, the surveys were digitized through a laborious process that required hand tracing of the maps

In 2001, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency awarded NDDA a grant that enabled the agency to contract private businesses to help compile and digitize the surveys.

“Agri Images, Inc. of Maddock was the main contractor,” Johnson said. “They developed an electronic process to compile the maps that proved so effective that the project that was finished years ahead of time at a savings of about \$300,000.”

Heglund said that people who do not have access to a computer can still get printed surveys of specific tracts through county NRCS offices.

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