

## Roger Windhorn — Illinois' Featured NRCS Employee

Employee Job Title: Geologist

Location: Champaign, Illinois

Date: May, 2008



**Roger Windhorn**  
Soil Scientist

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### Meet Roger Windhorn

Roger Windhorn’s first introduction to SCS was back in 1970 as ag science student trainee from the University of Illinois. He spent one summer in Kankakee County and another in Pike County. As Roger remembers it, he went out one afternoon with a couple of soil scientists and on the way back to the office he heard himself say, *“Well I know one thing I don’t want to be and that’s a geologist!”*

Eventually Roger ate those words. But what brought him back around? As with many conservationists, whose futures and careers seem to hinge on one fateful moment or event, Roger’s fate with soil was sealed after a field trip with U of I instructor Burt Ray who was teaching Soils 301 on Soil Genesis and Classification. *“We went to southern Illinois and pulled cores for three days,”* explains Roger. *“On the four hour trip back north, we were caught in a terrible rainstorm. All the tags, data, and soil series information we needed to distinguish all 25 core samples were destroyed—there was no way to tell what was what. We had no data for our final reports.”* And then long-time soil guru Burt Ray stepped up to the truck. Using his experience and talents as a true scientist, Ray was quickly able to identify and sort and reclassify all 25 cores right before Roger’s eyes. *“I was amazed,”* says Roger. *“That’s when I realized there was more to this than I had thought. I wanted to know more about soils.”* The rest is history.

Roger’s current role is two-fold—he acts as a resource soil scientist and also performs inventories for soil sediment and erosion control



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projects and in his spare time is the NRCS State Geologist. Soil geomorphology is at the center of his geologist job, which is right where Roger likes it. By performing inventories for watershed planning efforts, Roger helps communities assess current conditions of erosion and sediment issues which is crucial for planning, obtaining benchmark data, and prioritizing concerns for long-range plans. *“Gathering soils and erosion data for watersheds also helps us gain a larger picture of statewide concerns and trends,”* adds Roger.



Does Roger fit the “mold” of a typical die-hard, loner soil scientist? Only in part. While he loves being on his own, outdoors pulling cores and mapping the soils of Illinois, he is equally at home in the company of his teammates, students, watershed groups, and others. *“That’s the best part about this job,”* says Roger. *“I get the best of both worlds!”*

In addition to gathering data and inventory work, Roger also has a strong interest and commitment in educating young people on the importance of soil. *“I guess I see teaching as our chance to set the record straight and get good solid information out about soil,”* says Roger who regularly volunteers to work with students at the annual EnviroThon, Earth Day events, teacher workshops, training sessions, and any other opportunities that arise. The future turnover of NRCS technical specialists will be a great loss. That’s why each time Roger works with students—whether it’s a 5th grade class or a group of high school seniors—he pushes the marvels of soil science. *“If just one kid out of every 80 remembers something I said about soil, it just may drive them into their own pursuit of the science,”* says Roger. Roger Windhorn may be a soil scientist, but in a way, he’s a lot like both his paternal and maternal grandfathers who farmed the land. The difference is he’s not planting corn or beans; he’s planting seeds that will become soil scientists of the future. Roger’s livelihood is geology, but his life is soil!

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