MLRA Soil Survey Offices Ad Hoc Committee

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Committee Charge

Propose methods to strengthen and improve cooperator roles and decision making within new NRCS soil survey structure (MLRA-SSOs)

3 Questions

1. What is the best procedure for documenting the information gaps for the new MLRA Soil Survey Areas?
2. Assuming there is an agreed to grouping of data gaps, needs and priorities, what is the best mechanism for funding them?
3. What changes to existing, or new organizational structures are needed in order to strengthen the cooperator roles in the new MLRA structure?

Incorporation of Existing Data

- Review of theses, dissertations, and reports to identify data that supports soil survey program
- Incorporation of university lab data into Soil Survey database
  - Not easy
    - Diversity of data types and formats
  - Guidelines
    - Restructuring of NASIS and other databases to accommodate non-traditional data
    - Thorough review of university data for consistency by an experienced pedologist.
    - Georeferencing of pedon locations and stratification of the data by MLRA.

Data Collection

- Minimize and identify estimated values in NASIS
- Global data needs
  - Depth and duration of seasonal saturation
  - Saturated hydraulic conductivity
  - Refinement or redefinition of drainage class for consistency across political boundaries
  - Evaluation and identification of soils with oxyaquic conditions
  - Descriptions and data for materials deeper than 2 m
  - Baseline heavy metal concentrations
  - Impact of broad differences in land use on soil properties
- Need mechanism to ensure quality and consistency of data among MLRA SSOs

Data Collection

- Local data needs
  - Specific needs to drive local interpretations
  - Specific soil conditions
- Still need assurance of quality and compatibility
- Data must be compatible across political boundaries

MLRA SSO Steering Team (Investigation Team)

- Identify and prioritize data needs
  - Initially concentrate on Benchmark Soils
- Develop work plan
  - Justification
  - Objective
  - Methods
  - Timeline
  - Who will do the work
- Composition
  - Regional MO staff
  - State Soil Scientist
  - Resource soil scientist
  - Local conservationist and/or other users
  - Cooperator
- Examples are in place

Relationship to Research Needs Committees

- Data collection instead of research
- May result in research questions
- Research possibilities in analysis of global data
- Should be line of communication between groups

Funding

- Funds need to be made available to each MLRA SSO
  - Consistency may be better than large quantity available sporadically
  - All offices may not need the same amount
  - Based on work plans?
- Pass funds through State Soil Scientists
  - Should not be an impediment to work across state boundaries
  - Avoidance of concentration of cooperator funding to subset of states
- Identify local sources of funds for specific local needs
  - Regulatory

Ways to Get Things Done

- Provide equipment needed to achieve data collection objectives
  - Lab equipment
  - Field equipment
    - Amoozemeters
    - Tablet computers
  - Equipment to implement new technologies
  - Needs will vary with location and availability of outside resources
- Fund/use those best equipped to get things done

Ways to Get Things Done

- Incorporate MLRA SSO soil scientists, MO staff, and cooperators in all data collection projects
- Student internships
  - Undergraduate
  - Graduate
  - Pass funds through university cooperators
    - More bang for the buck
- Retired soil scientists
  - Data collection and checking
  - Metadata for map units
- Graduate students to meet specific data needs that can also become a research problem
  - Develop mechanism to allow soil scientists to pursue graduate degrees