

National State Soil Scientist's Workshop
Thursday, March 20, 2008
Discussion Group 2: National Legend

The topic of the discussion group was clarified as the creation of a national mapping unit symbol legend. There was some confusion about it being national map legend, in the sense of placing a legend on a map.

Introductory remarks centered on previous attempts to have a national mapping unit legend approved and the problems associated with these attempts. Previous discussions on this topic had isolated a philosophical difference between those who favored a connotative symbol for mapping units and those who favored a non-connotative symbol. After much discussion, and a review of statistics from Web Soil Survey usage, consensus was reached that user's of soil survey products seldom request a soil map with symbols; but more often opt for soil interpretations and soil physical and chemical properties. It was acknowledged that the group most opposed to a non-connotative map unit symbol was NRCS employees.

Further discussion centered on the actual use of the soil map unit symbol. It was concluded that the symbol was a "tag" that linked the map unit delineation, or polygon, to data. As such, the "style" of the symbol was not as critical as many alleged it to be.

The group then addressed the need to maintain multiple symbols for each map unit. Using the "Do-No-Harm" logic, it was concluded that information repositories such as the NRCS Customer Service Toolkit and the FSA Soil Rental Rate database were linked directly to the map unit symbols currently in NASIS SSURGO exports. Revising the official map unit symbol to one other than the one linked to these databases would create much turmoil and an enormous editing workload. Representatives from the National Soil Survey Center informed the group that, "technically," NASIS could maintain multiple map unit symbols for each map unit. With the release of NASIS 6.0, designation of one symbol as the official symbol and maintaining other symbols for various uses should be a fairly simple matter.

The group's next question was whether or not a symbol, code, or identifier existed that is unique to each soil map unit and could be used as the official national symbol. It was concluded the MUID Code in NASIS was the only unique identifier. It was also concluded that this code could be used as the official map unit identifier.

The logical next question was, "How soon could adoption of the map unit code as the official national legend symbol be implemented?" Apparently, the adoption of the MUID Code can happen immediately. Development of multiple symbol capability, however, entails additional modification to NASIS and will take more time. Since NASIS 6.0 was so close to release, it appeared implementation of the national symbol protocol would have to wait to be released with a subsequent version; maybe NASIS 6.0.1.

Having agreed on the adoption of the NASIS MUID code as the national symbol, and obtaining agreement from the National Soil Survey Center to modify NASIS to accommodate multiple symbols for each map unit, the group adjourned.