



# NATIONAL COOPERATIVE SOIL SURVEY STRATEGIC PLAN

PUBLIC DRAFT, JUNE 2016

# THE STRATEGIC PLAN

This strategic plan will guide NCSS operations for a 10-year period. The plan was developed to clarify the purpose and activities of the NCSS, reinforce partnerships and collaborations, provide a basis for decision making, and improve NCSS communications. The need to develop this plan was driven by changes in science, technology, fiscal conditions, professional culture, and world events. The plan's developers acknowledge the importance of and challenges from generational staffing turnover, changing societal needs, and novel ecological conditions and see this strategy as a pragmatic path toward increasing the sustainability of the NCSS and the science of soils.

## VISION

A society that values soil as an ecological resource

## MISSION

Provide knowledge about soils and ecosystems for resource management

## GOALS

Communicate the importance of soils to society

Increase the knowledge base for soils and ecosystems

Strengthen and expand collaboration

Ensure a critical mass of well-qualified scientists and technical specialists

## OBJECTIVES IN SUPPORT OF THE GOALS

### COMMUNICATE THE IMPORTANCE OF SOILS TO SOCIETY

- Promote public awareness and education.
  - Develop, implement, and share outreach-involvement plans.
  - Continue to explore the collaborative development of outreach materials.
    - Share the outreach materials through an online clearing house.
  - Promote better use of technology and tools.
- Cultivate equity, diversity, and leadership.
  - Increase engagement of underserved and minority groups.
  - Increase accessibility of our information.
  - Develop effective community leadership.
  - Increase community capacity to use NCSS information.
- Promote NCSS messages through the media.
  - Increase use of radio, newspaper, and social media.
- Promote the use of soils data and knowledge in other disciplinary activities.
- Facilitate the expanded research and delivery of related scientific findings to society.

### INCREASE THE KNOWLEDGE BASE FOR SOILS AND ECOSYSTEMS

- Create a culture of continual relevancy and improvement.
- Focus research, data collection, and development pursuits on existing data voids.
  - Generate additional characterization data with emphasis on benchmark soils and soil series that are currently unsupported by laboratory data.
  - Define and describe ecological sites.
  - Continue to work on SSURGO.
  - Incorporate biological, temporal, and dynamic soil properties into our data structure.
- Work toward common standards.
  - Collaborate on standards for data collection and analysis.
  - Collaborate on standards for raster products.
  - Conduct an open and transparent process to propose fundamental changes to Soil Taxonomy leading to a more user-friendly product.
  - Ensure broad participation in the revision of the Soil Survey Manual.
- Develop new data and knowledge delivery systems that take advantage of changing technology.
- Develop and deliver soils information for all lands in the United States.
- Develop new soils information products to address changing user requirements.

## **STRENGTHEN AND EXPAND COLLABORATION**

- Develop a guidance document for NCSS operations (e.g., charter or bylaws). Include role definitions for cooperators. Begin work on the document at the 2016 regional conferences and complete the document for review at the 2017 national conference.
- Ensure the NCSS is a work-planning organization.
- Develop partnerships with non-traditional cooperators at local, regional, and national levels. Examples include EPA, USGS, FSA, The Nature Conservancy, and corporations, such as Google and ESRI.
- Set up regular communication amongst cooperators.
  - Develop a communication plan.
    - Establish and maintain a mailing list.
- Enable cooperators to regularly meet at local, State, and regional levels. Have face-to-face meetings at each level at least once every 5 years.
- Develop an action plan to implement the strategic plan. The action plan will include specific, attainable outcomes with due dates and responsible parties. Use the action plan to determine the necessary structure for the NCSS.
- Create a mechanism to support the development of research proposals to advance NCSS collaboration. Proposals are needed to address both regional and national issues. The mechanism should be in place before the 2018 NCSS regional conferences.

## **ENSURE A CRITICAL MASS OF WELL-QUALIFIED SCIENTISTS AND TECHNICAL SPECIALISTS**

- Provide and promote training.
  - Develop and provide technical workshops and training opportunities in conjunction with State and regional organizations.
- Provide an online clearinghouse of information related to training.
  - The clearinghouse should be coordinated with HR specialists and in place before the 2018 NCSS regional conferences.
  - Include a wide range of training opportunities that integrate classroom knowledge with field knowledge.
  - Include accredited courses (i.e., university online courses and continuing education courses) that can be supplemental curriculum for schools that don't have traditional soils programs.
- Improve recruitment into professions needed by the NCSS in the next 5 years.
  - Increase the presence of NCSS employers (including scientists and technical staff, not just HR) at job fairs (local, professional societies, etc.), sponsor academic events (soil and land judging), and recruit volunteers and interns.

- Explore alternative hiring practices by NCSS employers, including direct, onsite hiring authority. Position(s) need to be well publicized sufficiently in advance both within and external to the NCSS.
  - Provide resources to assist applicants with hiring processes and with understanding career paths.
- Raise awareness to stakeholders and decision makers regarding current problems in hiring, recruitment, retention, and other opportunities, e.g., direct hiring authorities.
- Acknowledge and communicate challenges of the status quo with regard to recruiting and hiring well-qualified, under-represented and under-served groups.
- Increase outreach, spread information about job requirements and degree programs, and work with institutions to develop transfer or partnership programs.
- Increase availability of information about opportunities for details and sabbaticals among cooperators.
- Promote the concepts of phased retirement, employee retention, generational transition, knowledge transfer, and succession planning.

## ACTION ITEMS FOR THE STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE

- Dave Lindbo will sponsor monthly teleconferences for the NCSS strategic planning committee (SPC) and eventually for an NCSS steering committee.
- Pam Thomas, Michael Robotham, and Dave Lindbo will investigate adding an element related to NCSS to the performance evaluation worksheets for employees of NRCS Soil Science Division.
- NRCS will send a reminder to appropriate universities and others about their agreements related to the NCSS. Maxine Levin, Mickey Ransom, and Michael Robotham (lead) will develop a template.
- Dave Lindbo or his designee will investigate the possibility of discussing the NCSS at a meeting of Ag Experiment Station directors or of the Experiment Station Committee on Organization and Policy (ESCOP).
- Teams from the SPC will:
  1. Edit the strategic plan. Aaron Achen will develop a first draft of the strategic plan based on the documents from the meeting of the SPC. The draft will be sent for review to Paul McDaniel, Mickey Ransom, Ron McCormick, and Dave Lindbo by June 3. The copy to be presented at the regional conferences will be posted by June 15.
  2. Develop a communication plan for NCSS. The team members will be Jim Thompson (lead), Linda Greene, Jennifer Mason, and Meredith Albers. Dave Lindbo will ensure the final plan is vetted through personnel on the NRCS public affairs staff.
  3. Coordinate implementation of the strategic plan. The team members will be Dave Lindbo (lead), Richard Griffin, Ron McCormick, Wade Bott, and Larry Laing. The first monthly teleconference for the team will be held by June 15.
- The communication team will investigate the creation and maintenance of the online clearing house. Members of the team are Jim Thompson (lead), Linda Greene, Jennifer Mason, and Meredith Albers.
- Dave Lindbo or his designee will present the draft strategic plan at each regional conference. Comments from conference participants are due by September 1. The strategic planning committee will finalize the plan for official release by early October.
- Dave Hoover and Dave Lindbo will investigate the possibility of the NCSS having full-time employees and the possibility of NRCS having one or more employees with full-time commitments to the NCSS.
- Mike Robotham will send a copy of the original MOU (and/or other enabling documents) for the NCSS to all members of the strategic planning committee.

## Strategic Planning Committee; May 24, 2016

### NRCS: Soil Science Division

David Lindbo	Director, Soil Science Division (SSD), NRCS-SSD, Washington, DC
Pam Thomas	Associate Director, Soils Program, NRCS-SSD, Washington, DC
David Hoover	Acting Director, National Soil Survey Center (NSSC), NRCS-NSSC, Lincoln, NE
Maxine Levin	National Leader, Soil Interpretations, NRCS-NSSC, Beltsville, MD
Michael Robotham	National Leader, Technical Soil Services, NRCS-SSD, Lincoln, NE
Charles Love	Regional Director, Soil Survey Region 7, NRCS-SSD, Auburn, AL
Chad Remley	Regional Director, Soil Survey Region 5, NRCS-SSD, Salina, KS
Joel Brown	National Leader, Ecological Sites, NRCS-NSSC, Las Cruces, NM
Michael Margo	Ecological Site Specialist, Soil Survey Region 12, NRCS-SSD, Tolland, CT
Jennifer Mason	MLRA Soil Survey Leader, NRCS-SSD, Clinton, TN
Erik Dahlke	MLRA Soil Survey Leader, NRCS-SSD, Mount Vernon, WA

### NRCS: States

Debbie Surabian	State Soil Scientist, NRCS-Connecticut, Tolland, CT
Wade Bott	State Soil Scientist, NRCS-North Dakota, Bismarck, ND
Meredith Albers	Resource Soil Scientist, NRCS-Utah, Salt Lake City, UT

### Partner Agencies

Larry Laing	National Soils Program Leader, U.S. Forest Service, Washington, DC
Jon Lane	Regional Soil Scientist, U.S. Forest Service, Juneau, AK
Ron McCormick	National Soils Program Leader, Bureau of Land Management, Washington, DC

### Partner Universities

Richard Griffin	Professor, Prairie View A&M University, Prairie View, TX
Paul McDaniel	Professor, University of Idaho, Moscow, ID
Mickey Ransom	Professor, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS
Jim Thompson	Professor, West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV

### Facilitator

Aaron Achen	Editor, National Soil Survey Center, NRCS-NSSC, Lincoln, NE
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