

Soils Outreach Team – Recommendations

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Introduction

Soil Science Division leadership tasked the team with assessing the current status of our Soils outreach to our internal and external customers and provide recommendations for improvement. Our recommendations are summarized below. Supporting ideas for each recommendation are included in the remaining report.

Summary of Recommendations

A) Short-term – within FY17

- Solicit feedback from our customers online.
- Encourage visitors at our exhibit booths at upcoming events to provide feedback.
- Identify priority audiences.
- Use feedback to identify other areas for improvement.
- Identify needed brochures and displays that will help our outreach efforts.

B) Medium-term – 1 to 3 years

- Develop new exhibits.
- Develop new brochures, PowerPoint presentations, YouTube videos, and audience-specific webpages.
- Increase social media presence using Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, blogs, etc...
- Consider adding outreach to employee Performance Plans to encourage wider participation in outreach activities.

C) Long-term – 3 to 5 years

- Create an infrastructure that enables Soils outreach to a larger and broader audience by utilizing more local staff to attend a greater number of conferences under limited travel budgets.
- Enable a more coordinated targeting of our message to under-served groups.
- Track “measurable goals” to ensure continuous improvement of our outreach activities.

Recommendation Details

A) Short-term – within FY17

- **Solicit feedback from our customers online.**
 - Use Foresee Customer Satisfaction Performance Report – Collect feedback from this report for any comments related to Soils. Consider adding questions that are more specific to Soils.
 - Monitor online Soils feedback forms:
<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/soils/contactus/feedback/>
- **Encourage visitors at our exhibit booths at upcoming events to provide feedback.**
 - A feedback handout/sign was created (see Appendix I. Sample feedback request).
- **Identify priority audiences.**
 - External customers: Students, Teachers, Farmers, Ranchers, Suburban Homeowners, Urban Homeowners, Researchers, Cooperators, Consultants, Emergency Managers, NGO/nonprofits, Engineers, Architects, Builders, Home buyers, Policy makers, Military, Federal agencies and others.
 - We should reach out to all potential customers.
 - We should develop our outreach information products to meet the needs of each customer group.
 - Expand the “Browse by Audience” section on the Soils webpage to include some of these other customers.
 - Internal Customers: NRCS employees, NRCS leadership, USDA employees, USDA leadership, NCSS Partners.
 - Weekly Update, Inside NRCS, NCSS Newsletter have all been used to highlight our soils products.
 - USDA Connect is the NRCS employee Intranet and could be an avenue for increasing awareness.
 - Need to make sure that we keep “selling” Soils to other NRCS divisions.
 - Exhibiting at Conferences (see Appendix II. List of National Organizations).
 - Groups we have missed.
 - NGOs such as the Natural Areas Association (NAA) – many groups are applying land management on the ground and do not consider the soils and they don’t know what we can offer.
 - Other nonagricultural environmental groups.
 - Minority groups and underserved communities.
- **Use feedback to identify other areas for improvement.**
 - Monitor feedback and provide regular reporting to outreach leadership.
 - Create a SharePoint site for capturing exhibiting experiences of staff and sharing feedback from exhibit visitors.
- **Identify needed brochures and displays that will help our outreach efforts.**
 - Existing exhibit handouts:
 - Web Soil Survey brochure

- National Soil Survey Center brochure (out of date)
- Soils Planner (since 1999)
- 12 Soil Orders poster (low supply)
- Book mark with soils.usda.gov (out of print)

B) Medium-term – 1 to 3 years

- **Develop new exhibits**
 - New Soils display – design is currently under review with planned December 2016 completion. The new display will be large with workstations and skins that can be swapped depending on audience. What themes will be available for the display skins?
 - Existing displays:
 - 12 individual pullup banners of Soil Orders
 - Web Soil Survey nomadic
 - Agency Soil Health displays
 - Other soils displays created at the Regional/State level
- **Develop new brochures, PowerPoint presentations, YouTube videos, and audience-specific webpages.**
 - Utilize customer feedback and past experiences of exhibiting to update and create new information products that help everyone better understand and use our soil resources.
 - Expand our training materials on soils applications and databases, e.g. Web Soil Survey users may not be aware of all of its capabilities.
- **Increase social media presence using Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, blogs, etc...**
 - On the NCSS Facebook page we should be following the pages of some National Organizations and ask them to follow ours.
 - Weekly Update content will be available online via link on the NSSC Facebook page.
 - Expand our videos on YouTube to include short videos on specific topics, e.g. Web Soil Survey how-to videos.
 - Determine other popular social media platforms for younger audiences. They may be less likely to use Facebook and, instead, use Instagram for social interactions. Younger audiences often use YouTube instead of text-dominant websites for information.
 - On the main NRCS website there is a link to the NRCS Blog and on that page there are categories, including Soil Survey (0). We should get some items posted. All of the other categories have at least one post. Potential blog posts should be sent to Sarah Haymaker, NHQ Public Affairs, for posting to: <https://www.blogs.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/blog/nrcsblog/home/>
 - An example of the effectiveness of social media outreach is Susan Southard's Soil Color blog that was used by Munsell Company's website. See: <http://munsell.com/color-blog/soil-colors-national-parks-anniversary/>. The

International Union of Soil Science shared this link in one of their recent newsletters sent to its members. Potential for using Janice Lang’s work on the Munsell site.

- Inside NRCS Employee e-Newsletter goes to all employees and so we should continue contributing stories.
- Increase Tweets, especially during meetings and events.
- GovDelivery – thousands of people have signed up to receive the periodic emailed updates on products.
- **Consider adding outreach to employee Performance Plans to encourage more participation in outreach activities.**
 - “Exceeds Fully Successful” rating would require participation in at least one outreach event.

C) Long-term – 3 to 5 years

- **Create an infrastructure that enables Soils outreach to a larger and broader audience by utilizing more local staff to attend a greater number of conferences under limited travel budgets.**
 - Expand use of our staff resources at the Regional Office level. Encourage people within each region that have an interest and/or experience in outreach and provide them with the means to exhibit at conferences that we want to target and that occur in their region. This will save on travel expenses and NHQ/NSSC staff time.
 - If employee Performance Plans include incentives for outreach activities the number of people reached will increase.
- **Enable a more coordinated targeting of our message to under-served groups.**
 - Leadership should identify under-served audiences and prioritize future exhibiting and encourage development of new information products to meet the needs of these audiences.
- **Track “measurable goals” to ensure continuous improvement of our outreach activities.**
 - Establish “Measurable Goals” such as number of visitors, number of requests for additional info, invitations to provide workshops.
 - Review “Measurable Goals” with the objective of having follow on activities that improve our outreach by:
 - Creating Partnerships
 - Becoming the POC for continuing education credits for soils.
 - Provide workshops to increase awareness and use of our products.
 - Keep monitoring our soils website metrics and social media metrics to help us focus on the quality of our content and ensure we promote ourselves using relevant online social outlets.

Appendix I. Sample feedback request

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
Soils
United States Department of Agriculture

Topics | Soil Survey | Soil Health | Contact Us

You are Here: [Home](#) / [Contact Us](#) / Feedback Forms

Contact Us

- Directories
- Feedback Forms
 - Anonymous Feedback
 - Civil Rights
 - Questions/Comments

Feedback Forms

We welcome your feedback to help us serve you better. Please click the feedback form links in the left navigation bar or the buttons below. When you submit feedback, our subject-matter expert will get your input.

Questions/Comments
Use this feedback form to report issues or suggest improvements for this website, request data/information, or to ask for assistance.

Anonymous Feedback
Use this feedback form to anonymously submit comments or suggestions to the Soil Science Division Director. The Director will receive only the Subject and the Comment and is the only one who will see your feedback.

Civil Rights Feedback
Use this feedback form for any Civil Rights concerns including: USDA/1890 National Scholars Program, 1994 Land Grant Institutions, Alternative Dispute Resolution, EEO or Program Discrimination Complaint Filing, Freedom of Information Act, Outreach Efforts, Privacy Act, and Special Emphasis Programs. Your feedback will go to the Director of the Soil Science Division.

We Need You!
*Help us serve you better,
give us some feedback.*

<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/soils/contactus/feedback/>

Appendix II. Exhibiting at Conferences

List of organizations and events where SSD has exhibited (Future meeting location and date).

- American Society of Landscape Architects (Los Angeles, CA, Oct 20-23, 2017)
- American Planning Association (New York, NY, May 6-9, 2017)
- American Society of Agricultural & Biological Engineers (Spokane, WA, July 16-19, 2017)
- National Association of Realtors' Land Institute Conference (Charlotte, NC, March 31 – April 2, 2017)
- National Association of Realtors Conference—(Chicago, IL, November 3-6, 2017)
- Association of State Dam Safety Officials—(San Antonio, TX, September 10-14, 2017)
- Joint Federal Interagency Conference (Federal Interagency Sedimentation Conference/Federal Interagency Hydrologic Modeling Conference—(2010)
- National Society of Black Engineers Int'l Conference—(Kansas City, MO, March 29 - April 2, 2017)
- American Society of Agronomy, Crop Science Society of America, Soil Science Society of America International Meetings (Tampa, FL, October 22-25, 2017)
- National Cooperative Soil Survey Conferences (National and Regional meetings)
- World Congress of Soil Science International Meetings (every 4 years, Rio 2018)
- Girl Scouts of America, National (Columbus, OH, October 4-8, 2017)
- Boy Scouts of America, National Jamboree (WV, July 19-28, 2017)
- USDA Agricultural Outlook Conference (Arlington, VA, February 23-24, 2017)
- National Science Teachers Association (Los Angeles, CA, March 30 - April 2, 2017)
- NRCS Joint Professional Employee Organizations and Special Emphasis Program Managers Training Conference
- American Association of Geographers (Boston, MA, April 5-9, 2017)
- Ecological Society of America (Portland, OR, August 6-11, 2017)
- Geological Society of America Annual Meeting (Seattle, WA, October 22-25, 2017)
- Soil and Water Conservation Society (Madison, WI, July 30 - August 2, 2017)
- Soil Judging events – National and International (DeKalb, IL, April 23-28, 2017)

Other organizations that we should consider (Future meeting location and date).

- American Society of Naturalists, the Society of Systematic Biologists, and the Society for the Study of Evolution Joint Meeting (Portland, OR, June 23-27, 2017)
- Association of Consulting Foresters (Lake Tahoe, CA, May 20-23, 2017)
- Land Trust Alliance (Denver, CO, October 26-28, 2017) (NRCS has exhibited)
- George Wright Society Conference on Parks, Protected Areas, and Cultural Sites (Norfolk, VA, April 2-7, 2017)
- Natural Areas Association (2017 meeting TBD)
- National Association for Interpretation (Spokane, Washington, November 14-18, 2017)