

Soil Science Division

Soil Survey Region 7



Soil Survey Office at Tupelo, Mississippi (7-TUP)

Course Assistance and Recruitment for Plant and Soils Department, Mississippi State University

By Steve Depew, MSSO project leader, Tupelo, Mississippi (7-TUP). Photos courtesy of Rachel Stout-Evans, MSSO project leader, Greenwood, Mississippi (7-GRE).

Purpose

Even after moving into the update phase of soil survey in 2008, we have maintained a professional relationship with Mississippi State University, Plant and Soils Department. This includes mostly field activities in conjunction with lab courses in soil science. We keep informed on those students that are interested in a career in soil science. This year we have a recruit, JC Butler. JC will graduate this summer. He has over 20 credit hours of soil science and would very much like to pursue a career in this field. Because he started his soil science courses late in his degree program, he was not able to take advantage of the Pathways program. Our outreach to JC has included two special topics courses in which he works hand in hand with the MLRA soil survey office (MSSO) in Tupelo along with the resource soil scientist located in this office. We have set up an Earth Team volunteer schedule for JC this summer. He will work 160 hours and participate directly in soil survey update work and Technical Soil Services (TSS).

The use of Earth Team hours as a replacement for a paid internship is an option for those not eligible or not selected for Pathways positions. In addition to volunteering, JC will complete a report of his summer work for course credit. We thought that it was important to share the set-up for JC to show how the Earth Team can be another viable recruitment tool.

Key Outcomes

- JC will earn course credit for a special topic in soil science for his volunteer work.
- He will have at least 160 hours of documented on-the-job training in the field of soil science working with soil survey and TSS.
- During the TSS work, he will be exposed to conservation planning, engineering, GIS, wetlands, and other agency activities and objectives.
- JC's volunteer work will assist us in supporting our customers by helping reduce the physical workload needed for site-specific interpretations.





Earth Team Volunteer JC Butler describes an Ora fine sandy loam in Clay County, Mississippi.

We hope others will consider working with the conservation part of NRCS, universities, and the Earth Team program. Recruitment is key to the future of the Soil Science Division. With many project leaders and other experienced soil scientists within 5 years of retirement, it is crucial to recruit and keep young people interested in the science.

Earth Team website: <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/people/volunteers/>

