TECHNICAL SOIL SERVICES: FY2015 UPDATE

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Overview of presentation

- Release of final TSS activities report
- TSS Reporting for FY2015
  - First quarter summary
- National TSS priority projects
- Upcoming cooperative activities
- Questions / concerns from the field
FY2014 Technical Soil Services Activities (and Instances) Report
FY2014 Activities Report

- Official report released on 2/19/2015 via NB 430-15-4
- Report summarizes instances of TSS assistance provided as reported using the NASIS-based reporting system
- Reporting is no longer voluntary for SSD-affiliated staff
- Reporting is and will remain voluntary for state/area-affiliated staff
- Activities report is very useful at the national level to document great work done in the field to support the agency and outside customers
Reported TSS Activities by State and Employee Affiliation for FY2014
Relative Percentage of TSS Activities by Type for FY2014
(Nationwide: Total of 34,524 activities)

- On-site wetland determination / delineation / appeal: 15%
- State/area level support for conservation operations: 12%
- Creating custom information (maps, reports): 10%
- Public education/outreach: 7%
- HEL determination: 7%
- Support for soil interpretations: 6%
- On-site assistance - other: 4%
- NRI support: 5%
- Providing training to NRCS and partners: 3%
- On-site conservation planning support: 3%
- Off-site wetland determination: 3%
- Soil judging contests, envirothons, etc.: 3%
- Application of ecological site information: 1%
- On-site investigation, soil health management: 1%
NRCS Programs Supported by TSS in FY2014 (percent of total instances)

- Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) 1%
- Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) 1%
- All other programs 1%
- Farmland Protection Policy Act (FPPA) 4%
- National Resources Inventory Program (NRI) 4%
- Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) 6%
- Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA) 83%
Key points from 2014 report

- Over 35,000 reports of TSS assistance nationwide
- Assistance provided by both State/Area and SSD staff
- Types of assistance activities remain generally consistent year-to-year
- 90+% of assistance provided to CTA
- Reported instances continue to increase
  - Better reporting? More being done? Both?
- Instances are a limited metric – all activities treated the same
FY2015 TSS Reporting Reminders and Update
New in FY2015

- Addition of “hours” in FY2015 as a reporting metric
- Changes in NASIS TSS tables and structure in NASIS 6.3
- Updated guidance documents available
- TSS reporting assistant spreadsheet
Minimum reporting criteria (National)

- Date completed (used to ID the fiscal year)
- TSS activity type
- Instances (assumed to be 1 if left blank)
- Total hours (for that entry)
- NASIS user name (populated automatically)
- Recipient
- Program Benefitted
- State
Resources to help

- YouTube video tutorial:
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s0yr2Vduur8

- Updated “helpful hints” document available on the TSS Sharepoint
FY2015 first quarter snapshot

- Over 2400 entries and over 6000 reported instances
  - Similar to previous years at this time
  - Report regularly (don’t save everything until 4th quarter)
  - Few entries (<50) missing “State”; more missing “Hours” (> 350) – please double-check your entries

- Activity types similar to previous years
  - Increase in NRI support (on-site grazing land inventory?)

- Vast majority of TSS support is related to CTA
  - Continue to look for opportunities to provide explicit support to Farm Bill programs
Reporting questions?
Moving forward in FY2015
TSS Business Plans

- Hope you have already have one for FY2015 but it’s never too late 😊

- Identify projected activities
  - What needs to be done?
  - When does it need to be done?
  - What are the resources required?

- Cooperative effort
  - Tie into State business plan
  - Coordinate with SSR business plan(s)

- Regular Communication is the Key
International Year of Soils (IYS)

International Year of Soils

Healthy Soils for a Healthy Life

Communications Plan for NRCS

More calendars available – regular announcements of activities
National TSS Activities

- Review and update the TSSH
  - Web links in current version have been updated and re-posted
  - Official request for comments and volunteers is working its way through channels

- Red parent material hydric soils project
  - Collaborative work with Marty Rabenhorst (UMD)
  - Official request for assistance in process

- Resource Stewardship Framework (Chief’s initiative)
  - Staff providing support to the “core team”

- Soils job approval authority
  - Working on framework – will be requesting input soon
National Ecological Observatory Network (NEON)

- Continental-scale observation system for examining ecological change over time
- Sites distributed throughout the US
- Long term monitoring (30 yr) with open data access
- NSF funding, multi-agency collaboration
- NRCS-SSD contracted to provide soils assistance in start-up phase – sampling and lab analysis
- Tremendous opportunities for collaboration for State and Area staff
- More information at: http://neoninc.org/
Second “round” of wetland assessment – 1000 sites nationwide – conducted by state agencies (EPA $)

NRCS-SSD provided training and lab assistance for first NWCA (2011)

NRCS-SSD contracted to provide training and lab assistance in 2016

NRCS-SSD has agreed to conduct more intensive sampling at selected sites in 2016

State level participation in any / all aspects of the project in cooperation with local partners is encouraged as time / priorities permit
Resources
The people: contact information
(who you gonna call?)

Michael Robotham – NL for TSS
All and sundry issues 😊
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Linda Scheffe
soil health, conservation planning, CDSI, models
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wetlands, compliance, soils JAA, training
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Other Resources

➢ TSS Handbook
  • Overview of TSS
  • Links to policies and other supporting docs
    • http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/soils/ref/?cid=nrcs142p2_053400

➢ TSS Sharepoint
  • Lots of resources – plan is to continue to expand – check out “shared documents”
    • https://ems-team.usda.gov/sites/NRCS_SSRA/ssp/tss/SitePages/Home.aspx
Questions submitted
Is there an NRCS policy about providing TSS in urban areas?
- No, and it fits under our overall legislative mandate
- It is a great opportunity, resources permitting

Who should be included in the Technical Teams and Management Teams from State/Area staff
- Technical team -- Area Soil Scientist(s) in area covered by the MLRA-SSO; others as needed
- Management team – State Soil Scientist(s) in area covered by the SSR; others as needed
- These teams are the key formal mechanism of communication between SSD and State/Area soils staff
- Regular, informal communication is HIGHLY encouraged
What is the status of national efforts to develop a mechanism to update soils data for FSA - CRP?

- Paul Finnell has developed a draft SDMA query and is working with selected states to evaluate – stay tuned.

Is there any progress on coordination between the “Receipt for Services” and TSS reporting?

- Nothing to report. Pam and Mike are still trying to coordinate with this group at the national level.

What is the status of RSS positions nationwide?

- Highly variable in terms of number, grade and supervision.
- SSD strongly encourages states to hire RSSs and supports integrated TSS programs coordinated by the SSS.
- STC controls state staffing decisions.
We know the SSD has committed to 15% CTA support and receives CTA funding. How should this be implemented at the state and local level?

- The 15% CTA is for the national program
- TSS needs and staff skill sets differ across the country
- Should be seen as a guideline, not as an absolute to be applied to every employee in every office
- Communication and coordination between SSRDs and State Soil Scientists is the key to success
- SSD staff should charge time in WebTCAS as per instructions from their SSRD
- State / Area staff should charge time in WebTCAS as per instructions from appropriate state leadership
What role(s) should soil scientists play in Soil Health related activities?

- Any and all roles with which they are comfortable
- Soil health is a key agency national initiative
- Soil scientists (SSS, RSS, SSR and MLRA-SSO staff) can provide valuable information and expertise

What is the role of SSD staff in compliance determinations (wetlands, HEL)

- Appropriately trained SSD staff can complete all of the technical aspects
- State staff must sign off on the official determination (that authority is delegated to the State Conservationist)
- Official memo awaiting final approval and release
How does TSS integrate (or not) with the increased involvement of SSD staff in work supported by reimbursable agreements?

- Reimbursable agreements are here to stay
  - Most have been for soil surveys
  - Local discussions of agreements for other purposes
- Agreements are for the provision of products and/or services; not for specific staff.
- Staff primarily being paid through reimbursable funds can do TSS (paid by NRCS) as a portion of their time
- Balancing staff workload and multiple priorities in these situations can be difficult and needs to be done on a local/regional basis (not from Lincoln or NHQ)
Other Questions?