Latest Version (3.0) of Web Soil Survey

The latest version of the Web Soil Survey 3.0 (WSS) was recently launched by the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and can be accessed at http://websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov. The web-based application provides a wealth of free soils information along with soil maps, properties, and interpretations aimed at helping with land use decisions. The web site, originally launched in August 2005, continues to improve and enhance features to meet the demands of its growing customer base of several million hits a year.

The first and most noticeable change in WSS 3.0 is the maximum size for the Area of Interest (AOI). It has been increased from 10,000 to 100,000 acres. The map imagery and map appearance also have been improved and they're now using imagery from Bing. The number of options for changing map properties has been expanded to include: soil boundary color; soil boundary thickness; soil label size; and background image shading. Plus, the identify tool can now display information about multiple data layers at the same time.

Soil special line features are now labeled according to the type of line feature. The label is an abbreviation, such as "ESO." The viewer can now use the map "identify" tool to see the corresponding feature name, such as "Escarpment, nonbedrock." SSURGO and STATSGO2 data can now be downloaded directly from WSS. The viewer no longer has to first define an AOI to get these data. And the viewer no longer needs to go to the Soil Data Mart.

To make things even better for the viewer, support has been added for data regarding the Pacific Island Area and for map unit line and point data. The options for tiling printable maps have been improved and Rich Site Summary (RSS) notifications are now available regarding soil data updates. And most importantly, WSS is now online 24/7 eliminating bothersome downtime.

These are a sampling of the enhancements in the latest version of WSS (3.0). Minor enhancements also have been added and more enhancements are planned for future releases. Since its beginning, the Web Soil Survey has attracted a wide array of online visitors from all over the world. During the first few months of its existence, the site averaged about 1000 users per day, but now the site has seen that number increase dramatically to about 6500 per day.

Soil surveys provide critical information in land use decisions, both on the farm and in the city. Whether a land developer is looking to build or purchase, or a farmer is considering alternative crops, soil survey data is a critical element in the decision making process that produces a successful outcome without harming natural resources. Making soils information available on the web has been a major achievement for NRCS, who is committed to making the process better and easier for the customer. NRCS is a science-based USDA federal agency committed to the preservation of the nation's natural resources through the use of conservation.