

# Northeast Area e-News

MLRA Soil Survey Region 12

Summer 2003

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## Beginnings and Endings

*Al Averill, MO-12 Soil Data Quality Specialist*

As the newest member of the MO-12 staff I'm keeping a commitment to write a letter of introduction of sorts. I write upon having just returned to the office from what is likely my last day of soil mapping after over 22 years in the field. So, please bear with me if I get a little nostalgic.

For those of you who are curious about who the new guy is, and at the risk of boring you—a little about myself. First and foremost I'm a husband and father. Annemarie and I have been married 16 years and have two wonderful daughters who are 6 and 8 years old and bring great joy on a daily basis.

I grew up in central Massachusetts and southern Rhode Island. I wanted to pursue work that would be hands-on and provided an opportunity to be outdoors so I studied soils at the University of Rhode Island. As I look back on my college experience, of the many soils and geology courses taken, a 1-credit course in soil judging would prove to be the most applicable to my future career path. In the fall of 1980, I was about to face a winter layoff from the nursery where I worked (couldn't get away from digging holes even through college), when I received a call from the SCS state office in Syracuse, N.Y. asking if I was available. They would not however hire me sight unseen so they asked Everett Stuart, Assistant State Soil Scientist for Rhode Island to interview me. I remember Ev specifically asking if I was willing to relocate periodically. Ironically, he recently retired from that same position after all these years. Anyway, he apparently felt I could walk and chew gum at the same time so he forwarded to Syracuse a positive recommendation.

I started as a GS-5 in the Catskill region of upstate New York (this I would learn is a relative term, if your from Manhattan, the Bronx is upstate). It was a great experience. The project leader was Steve Seifried, a fine person who demonstrated the patience of Job in his training approach and who had nurtured notables as Kip Kolesinskas and Jim Brown. It was Steve who once said, "Just plain old soil mapping and field work is about the best job I ever heard of." I thought about this a lot when trying to make career decisions.

Upon completing the field work for that survey in 1983, I was transferred to Putnam and Westchester Counties just north of New York City as a GS-9. The salary didn't go far in this high cost area but the quality of life was aided by the company of a fine crew. Steve Seifried was a sort of remote project leader as he remained in Sullivan County, and veteran field soil scientists Ted Trevail and Steve Page made for good comrades. Putnam County provided free office space which helped the SCS budget. The space was in the jail area of the old sheriff's office in a somewhat run-down mid-1800s era courthouse: you get what you pay for. (This experience should prove to be good training in preparation for working in the cavernous accommodations at the MO.) We had no copy machine which would prove fortuitous. While making copies at the field office in the adjacent town, I met my wife to be, who was interning at the time.

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## Bruce's MO Message

*Bruce Thompson, MLRA Soil Survey Region 12 Team Leader*

Since the electric grid is back online, I assume everyone is back to normal. During this troublesome period, I was attending the MLRA Team Leaders' summer meeting in Lexington, KY. Bill Craddock, State Soil Scientist/MO-18 Team Leader, did an excellent job of arranging accommodations and conducting excellent tours of the horse country, a bourbon distillery, and a farming operation heavy into tobacco production—all Kentucky agricultural specialties.

Tuesday evening we learned that Mike Golden, MO-9 Temple, Texas, had been selected as our new National Soil Survey Division Director. The final three candidates were all extremely capable individuals and I am sure Mike will, as our past Directors, provide us with excellent direction.

Division leaders and the Chief have prepared three separate projects that will impact our time for the next several years. The first is the development of a national map for common resource areas. This is a project that was started in the early 1990s but not completed for states in the MO-12 region. The work that has been done is related to the Forest Service and EPA eco-region maps. Each state has been requested to prepare a map using the STATSGO map and MLRA draft map. Most states will be using the MLRA map with few if any subdivisions. If states need subdivisions, they will be responsible for preparing the template for E-FOTG. The MO's responsibility is to work out the joins between the states and prepare a map for the MO region to send to Sharon Waltman at the NSSC.

The second project is that we need to complete our state activities on the MLRA map. The MO sent a completed draft to Sharon Waltman; therefore, the map portion of the project is complete. Jim Fortner, Soil Scientist, NSSC is preparing the draft descriptions of each MLRA and they will be sent to us for review and comment.

The third item is the update of STATSGO. The states need to finalize their maps. Most states decided not to make major changes in their map units. Vermont and Connecticut did make major revisions and their maps have been digitized. The joins with Massachusetts have been agreed upon. If Connecticut or Vermont needs to work with New York on the join situation, please schedule a time and place and the MO will be happy to attend and provide assistance.

Although, there has been no announcement yet, the Chief is considering accelerating the publication of soil surveys. There is a backlog of manuscripts in the system that are either waiting for maps to be prepared or technical edits to be completed so that they can be sent for English edit. Some of these are as much as 10 years old. Currently, we are funded for about 80 publications per year. If we are requested to clear the backlog within 3 years, it will mean preparing SSURGO and English edited manuscripts for about 180 publications for each of the next 3 years. This may mean that states will have to cut back on acres mapped in order to complete SSURGO and manuscript work. The MO will need to add a Writer/Editor to clear the English edit activities.

I am sure most of you have heard that starting on or about October 1<sup>st</sup> that we are once again going to go through reorganization. This one will mean the Institutes and the Regional offices will be closed and 3 new technical offices will take their places. The sites have not been announced, but the political side of government is in full swing attempting to influence the selection of sites. The MO's have been told that we are not impacted by the reorganization. NRI will be part of the Technology Units with 6 NRCS personnel and 7 contract members on each of the 3 units. The impact on the ICCS personnel and state operations has not been explained.

The MO was granted a waiver so that we could advertise the vacant Soil Data Quality Specialist position. I selected Al Averill, Soil Survey Project Leader in Franklin County, MA to fill the position. Al has 22 years of experience and has worked in New York and Massachusetts. Al's selection opened the flood gates and Jim Turenne, Project Leader for the Plymouth County, MA soil survey was selected as the Assistant State Soil Scientist for Rhode Island. Jim does reside in Rhode Island and he and his wife just had a new baby boy. At the same time Astrid Martinez, field soil scientist in Franklin County, MA took a soil conservationist position in Wisconsin. So in the time span of two weeks, my state soils staff was reduced by three-quarters. The positions will be filled but the advertising process is very slow and it will not take place this fiscal year. Hopefully, we will have the positions in place by mid-October or early November. ■

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Nearing the completion of the survey in 1985, an opportunity knocked from Middlesex Co. in eastern Massachusetts. This would offer multi-state experience and get me closer to family in RI. I took a lateral there and worked with Tom Peragallo, a very competent project leader who afforded me varied work experiences. I learned quite a bit about soil services as the area was experiencing booming development at the time. Tom decided to start his own consulting firm, and I was selected project leader in 1988. Upon completing the survey I transferred to Franklin County in western Massachusetts in 1990 and have been here since.

Franklin County is a beautiful, diverse place lying within the boundaries of four MLRA's. This morning I headed out early to finish the field work on my last map (last map; man, that sounds so sad). I started out by walking through an historic cemetery on kame and kettle topography. Passing into the upland woods, four grouse exploded from the underbrush. Upon approaching hayland a flock of wild turkeys clucked out a warning as I noted deer tracks at my feet. Heading back upslope to observe the deep/shallow soil break a large moving object become visible in the summer haze. Sure enough, a big black bear was lumbering along through the trees. This all occurred within two hours. I got to thinking about what Steve Seifried said. He was right, however, by the time I finished the traverse and came out on the road again, my boots were soaked through to my feet from wet grasses, and my clothes were soaked with sweat; even my wallet was wet. As I shifted my tools and map-board from hand-to-hand to facilitate the scratching of numerous mosquito bites, I was reminded there's good and not so good in most jobs.

I'm leaving a job I love but it might just be time for new experiences. There's great consolation in knowing there's a staff of good people at the MO. Bruce remains my boss who has promised to let me out for air once in a while. (Bruce, I figured I should get that in writing in one form or another.) I can't say enough about all the great people with whom it's been a pleasure to know over the last 22 years. This new job is an opportunity to expand the list.

As a new SDQS there's much to learn. I look forward to learning from you. Although the MO functions to help assure quality, I understand project leaders know more about the soils in their survey than any one and I regard soil survey field work as a noble and honorable endeavor requiring a high level of skill and expertise. My novice outlook on progress reviews is to approach them as peer reviews. I hope my knowledge and experience, (much of which was learned through mistakes; lessons well learned) will help you with your projects.

It looks like my first road trip will be to the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont in September. Project Leader, Roger DeKett has promised that he and crew will take it easy on me. I'm sure this will be the beginning of developing enjoyable relationships and I look forward to working with you all. ■

## Newsletter Feedback

*By Kristie Wiley, MO-12 Editor*

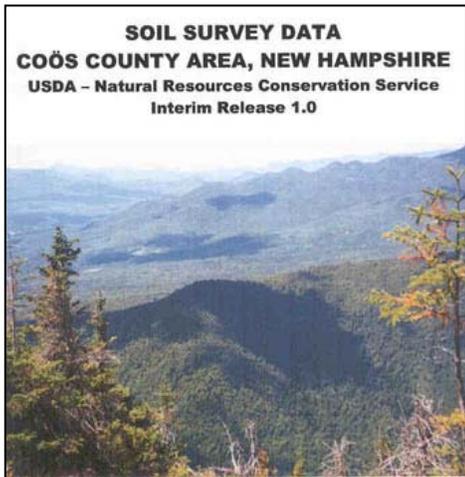
**Northeast Area News** was created in the fall of 1998 to serve as a communications tool for the soil scientists in the MO-12 region. Over the years I have received a lot of positive feedback on the newsletter. Your feedback is appreciated; however, I cannot take all of the credit. The newsletter has been a success because of the many contributing authors. **Thank you to all who have submitted articles and provided feedback.**

We welcome your comments on how we can improve the newsletter. Let us hear from you. Please send your comments to [Kristina.wiley@ma.usda.gov](mailto:Kristina.wiley@ma.usda.gov). ■

# Coös County, NH Soil Survey Information on CD

By Kathy Swain, Soil Scientist, New Hampshire

An Interim Soil Survey Report of the Coös County Area, New Hampshire, Version I, is now available on CD. It represents the completion of over 25 years of work by more than a dozen soil scientists. The Coös Co. Soil Survey is still scheduled to be published; however, in order to make this valuable information available as soon as possible the interim product on CD was produced.



Included on the CD are the soil maps, map unit and taxonomic unit descriptions, all narrative information, tables, interpretations, and the general soil map. Soil Survey Atlas Sheets and selected files are displayed in Adobe Acrobat® PDF. The general soil map was produced by applying generalization algorithms to the SSURGO data in Arc Info GIS. Hyper linking in HTML makes navigating the different areas of interest easy. The information is best viewed using Internet Explorer. All information is subject to change. We welcome your comments and suggestions.

Future plans are to make this information available interactively over the internet.

For copies of the CD, please contact either Joe Homer, Soil Survey Project Leader at [joseph.homer@nh.usda.gov](mailto:joseph.homer@nh.usda.gov) or Don Richard, GIS Specialist at [donald.richard@nh.usda.gov](mailto:donald.richard@nh.usda.gov). ■



John Hudak presenting an award to North East High School for winning the Pennsylvania Envirothon and the eventual National Canon Envirothon.

## 2003 Canon Envirothon International Competition

By Ed White, State Soil Scientist, Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania was awarded the top prize at the 2003 Canon Envirothon International competition held at Mount Saint Mary's College located in Emmitsburg, Maryland, July 26 - 31. Pennsylvania's representative was from Erie County's North East High School. NRCS Soil Scientists John Hudak and Jake Eckenrode help every year with the Pennsylvania Envirothon contest and committee. Since the start of the National Envirothon in 1988, a Pennsylvania Team has won the National Envirothon nine times.



Students study the soil in the 2003 Pennsylvania Envirothon.

More than 10,000 students from schools in 66 of Pennsylvania's 67 counties participate in the Pennsylvania Envirothon. Fifty teams, 44 from the U.S. and six from Canada, competed in the 2003 Canon Envirothon at St. Mary's College in Emmitsburg, MD. The Envirothon is North America's largest high school environmental competition. Organized through the National Association of Conservation Districts, the Canon Envirothon is the final competition in a series of contests beginning each spring that involves more than 500,000 teenagers throughout North America. ■

# Soil Climate Analysis Network (SCAN)

By Rich Gehring, Soil Scientist, Ohio

A second site in Ohio was recently added to the Soil Climate Analysis Network (SCAN). The first site in Ohio was installed in 1992 at the Molly Caren Agricultural Center outside of London, Ohio. It was one of the original 21 stations that were part of the Global Change Pilot Project. This later became known as the Soil Moisture/Soil Temperature Project. The new site in Ohio is part of a nationwide network that could add up to over 1,000 installations to monitor soil moisture and temperature as part of SCAN. SCAN uses meteor burst telemetry to transmit remote data in near real time. This is the same technology (SNOTEL) that NRCS's snow survey has used for years. Meteor burst telemetry uses the ionized meteorite trails to reflect a radio signal from the remote site to a base or master station. This technology is an inexpensive alternative to satellite communication or fixed landline service.



Personnel from the National Climate Center work on connecting the existing weather station to the SCAN tower (in foreground).

This second site is located in the heart of Lake County's nursery industry on a beach ridge near Lake Erie, in what used to be MLRA 100 and is now part of MLRA 139. The SCAN site was developed in cooperation with the Application Technology Research Unit of USDA-Agricultural Research Service; nursery growers in Lake County, OSU Extension, and Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center (OARDC) which began a research weather network in 2000 to archive weather data during horticultural experiments and to manage nursery field operations. Lake County has a large nursery industry, with 100 licensed nurseries with sales over \$90,000,000 annually. The earlier weather network collected atmospheric data including air temperature, solar radiation, wind speed and direction, relative humidity, and precipitation. In addition to the atmospheric data, soil temperature data was collected at depths of 5 cm and 10 cm. The NRCS National Climate Center staff added soil moisture and temperature sensors at depths of 20 cm, 50 cm, and 100 cm and installed the meteor burst communication technology. The existing climate data was being transmitted via landline to OARDC in Wooster, Ohio.

In addition to the National Climate Center staff, personnel from the National Soil Survey Center and ARS assisted in the installation of the new SCAN site in Lake County. The soil at the site was sampled and described by soil scientists from the Northeast Ohio project office, the area office, and state office. The local nursery industry will not be the only ones to benefit from the data obtained at this site. The data can also be used to verify and ground truth satellite and soil moisture model information. It can be used to monitor drought conditions and validate global climate models that

are used for climate forecasting. Data from the site is available to growers on the OARDC weather website at [www.oardc.ohio-state.edu/centernet/weather.htm](http://www.oardc.ohio-state.edu/centernet/weather.htm) or the NRCS SCAN data network website at [www.wcc.nrcs.usda.gov/scan/](http://www.wcc.nrcs.usda.gov/scan/) ■

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