

## How This Survey Was Made

This survey was made to provide information about the soils in the survey area. The information includes a description of the soils and their location and a discussion of the suitability, limitations, and management of the soils for specified uses. Soil scientists observed the steepness, length, and shape of slopes; the general pattern of drainage; the kinds of crops and native plants growing on the soils; and the kinds of bedrock. They dug many holes to study the soil profile, which is the sequence of natural layers, or horizons, in a soil. The profile extends from the surface down into the unconsolidated material from which the soil formed. The unconsolidated material is devoid of roots and other living organisms and has not been changed by other biological activity.

The soils in the survey area occur in an orderly pattern that is related to the geology, landforms, relief, climate, and natural vegetation of the area. Each kind of soil is associated with a particular kind of landscape or with a segment of the landscape. By observing the soils in the survey area and relating their position to specific segments of the landscape, a soil scientist develops a concept, or model, of how the soils were formed. Thus, during mapping, this model enables the soil scientist to predict with a considerable degree of accuracy the kind of soil at a specific location on the landscape.

Commonly, individual soils on the landscape merge into one another as their characteristics gradually change. To construct an accurate soil map, however, soil scientists must determine the boundaries between the soils. They can observe only a limited number of soil profiles. Nevertheless, these observations, supplemented by an understanding of the soil-landscape relationship, are sufficient to verify predictions of the kinds of soil in an area and to determine the boundaries.

Soil scientists recorded the characteristics of the soil profiles that they studied. They noted soil color, texture, size and shape of soil aggregates, kind and amount of rock fragments, distribution of plant roots, reaction, and other features that enable them to identify soils. After describing the soils in the survey area and determining their properties, the soil scientists assigned the soils to taxonomic classes (units). Taxonomic classes are concepts. Each taxonomic class has a set of soil characteristics with precisely defined limits. The classes are used as a basis for comparison to classify soils systematically. The system of taxonomic classification used in the United States is based mainly on the kind and character of soil properties and the arrangement of

horizons within the profile. After the soil scientists classified and named the soils in the survey area, they compared the individual soils with similar soils in the same taxonomic class in other areas so that they could confirm data and assemble additional data based on experience and research.

While a soil survey is in progress, samples of some of the soils in the area are generally collected for laboratory analyses and for engineering tests. Soil scientists interpret the data from these analyses and tests as well as the field-observed characteristics and the soil properties to determine the expected behavior of the soils under different uses. Interpretations for all of the soils are field tested through observation of the soils in different uses under different levels of management. Some interpretations are modified to fit local conditions, and some new interpretations are developed to meet local needs. Data are assembled from other sources, such as research information, production records, and field experience of specialists. For example, data on crop yields under defined levels of management are assembled from farm records and from field or plot experiments on the same kinds of soil.

Predictions about soil behavior are based not only on soil properties but also on such variables as climate and biological activity. Soil conditions are predictable over long periods of time, but they are not predictable from year to year. For example, soil scientists can predict with a fairly high degree of accuracy that a given soil will have a high water table within certain depths in most years, but they cannot assure that a high water table will always be at a specific level in the soil on a specific date.

After soil scientists located and identified the significant natural bodies of soil in the survey area, they drew the boundaries of these bodies on aerial photographs and identified each as a specific map unit. Aerial photographs show trees, buildings, fields, roads, and rivers, all of which help in locating boundaries accurately.

## Map Unit Composition

A map unit delineation on a soil map represents an area dominated by one major kind of soil or an area dominated by two or three kinds of soil. A map unit is identified and named according to the taxonomic classification of the dominant soil or soils. Within a taxonomic class there are precisely defined limits for the properties of the soils. On the landscape, however, the soils are natural objects. In common with other natural objects, they have a characteristic variability in their properties. Thus, the range of some observed

properties may extend beyond the limits defined for a taxonomic class. Areas of soils of a single taxonomic class rarely, if ever, can be mapped without including areas of soils of other taxonomic classes.

Consequently, every map unit is made up of the soil or soils for which it is named and some soils that belong to other taxonomic classes. In the detailed soil map units, these latter soils are called inclusions or included soils. In the general soil map units, they are called soils of minor extent.

Most inclusions have properties and behavioral patterns similar to those of the dominant soil or soils in the map unit, and thus they do not affect use and management. These are called noncontrasting (similar) inclusions. They may or may not be mentioned in the map unit descriptions. Other inclusions, however, have properties and behavior divergent enough to affect use or require different management. These are contrasting (dissimilar) inclusions. They generally occupy small

areas and cannot be shown separately on the soil maps because of the scale used in mapping. The inclusions of contrasting soils are mentioned in the map unit descriptions. A few inclusions may not have been observed and consequently are not mentioned in the descriptions, especially where the soil pattern was so complex that it was impractical to make enough observations to identify all of the kinds of soils on the landscape.

The presence of inclusions in a map unit in no way diminishes the usefulness or accuracy of the soil data. The objective of soil mapping is not to delineate pure taxonomic classes of soils but rather to separate the landscape into segments that have similar use and management requirements. The delineation of such landscape segments on the map provides sufficient information for the development of resource plans, but onsite investigation is needed to plan for intensive uses in small areas.