



# EXCERPTS FROM THE WEB SOIL SURVEY FAQ'S

COMPILED BY:

**St. Joseph County Soil & Water Conservation Partnership/  
USDA SERVICE CENTER OF ST. JOSEPH COUNTY**

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[www.stjoseph.iaswcd.org](http://www.stjoseph.iaswcd.org)



ALSO OF INTEREST:

Indiana Soils Program (links to various resources): <http://www.in.nrcs.usda.gov/mlra11/soils.html>

We would be glad to arrange for your agency, department and/or group to receive a free TRAINING SESSION on using the WEB SOIL SURVEY.

Let us know if this would be something that you are interested in.







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## Frequently Asked Questions

### General Issues

Question	Answer
When will Web Soil Survey have soil information for my particular county?	All data available in Web Soil Survey is stored in the NRCS Soil Data Mart. Each state is responsible for populating the Soil Data Mart for all counties in that state. For information about when data will be available for your county, contact your <a href="#">State Soil Scientist</a> . This link is also available from the <b>Contact Us</b> link.
When was Web Soil Survey first released?	<b>Secretary of Agriculture Mike Johanns announced the launch of the USDA Web Soil Survey site on August 16, 2005.</b>
How can I get help using Web Soil Survey?	<p>You can access context-specific online help throughout Web Soil Survey, by clicking the  question-mark icon. This opens up help for the particular feature or group of features where the icon is located. When you open a help item, the question-mark icon turns upside-down: . To close the help item, you can click the upside-down question mark icon, or click the Close button at the upper right of the open help item.</p> <p>Many help items are divided into sections, which can be opened and closed. To open a closed section, click the  plus-sign icon, and to close an open section, click the  minus-sign icon.</p> <p>If you need additional assistance, click the <b>Contact Us</b> link in the navigation bar, click the <a href="mailto:soilshotline@lin.usda.gov">soilshotline@lin.usda.gov</a> link, and we'll be glad to help you.</p> <p>OR</p> <p><b>For more detailed information, contact your local <a href="#">USDA Service Center</a> or your <a href="#">NRCS State Soil Scientist</a>.</b></p>
How can I find <i>such-and-such</i> in Web Soil Survey?	<p>Use the <b>Search</b> panel, in the upper left corner of each tab in Web Soil Survey. Enter keywords or phrases, and use the <b>Advanced Search</b> options if needed, and click <b>Search</b>.</p> <p>The search results are links that navigate to the the places in Web Soil Survey that match your search items.</p> <p>For more information, click the  icon in the <b>Search</b> panel.</p>

### Area of Interest and Quick Navigation

Question	Answer
How do I select the area for which I want to get soil information?	<p>Here are some basic instructions to get started using Web Soil Survey:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. On the left side of the screen in the <b>Quick Navigation</b> panel, click on one of the selection</li> </ol>

	<p>methods. For example, open <b>State/County</b>, select your state and county, and click <b>View</b>.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>After the map updates, click the <i>Zoom In</i> tool . Then click and drag a rectangle on the map to zoom to an area. Zoom in as close as you need to so you can see streets and landmarks you recognize.</li> <li>After the map updates, click the <i>AOI Rectangle tool</i> .</li> <li>Click and drag a rectangle around the area of the map you wish to set as your Area of Interest.</li> <li>The application will create the AOI you have specified. Now you can navigate to the <b>Soil Map</b> or <b>Soil Data Explorer</b> tabs and start getting soil information.</li> </ol> <p>If the area you are interested in is not rectangular, you can use the <i>AOI Polygon tool</i> . Click points on the map to define your AOI. Double-click or CTRL-click the final point to finish.</p>
<p>Why am I limited to an area of interest of 10,000 or fewer acres? Will this limit be removed at some point?</p>	<p>For performance purposes, in release 2.1 of Web Soil Survey, a restriction is required on the size of the AOI. This will likely be increased in a future release.</p>
<p>I want to get an exact definition of a subject property to match the Assessor's Parcel Map for a soil survey. Is there a way that I can pinpoint an exact parcel number or property for a soil survey?</p>	<p>This feature is not supported in the current release.</p>
<p>Can I use 911 addresses (physical address on county roads) in the address search feature?</p>	<p>This feature is not supported in the current release.</p>
<p>Can I import a shapefile into Web Soil Survey in order to define an area of interest?</p>	<p>This feature is not supported in the current release.</p>
<p>How can I bookmark or save my AOI so I can come back to it?</p>	<p>This feature is not supported in the current release.</p>
<p>My land contains more than one irregular-shaped field area of tillable land that is surrounded by non-tillable land. Is it possible to draw each area of tillable land as separate sub-parts of the AOI so the software can summarize each soil type from the total of field areas of tillable land that has been sketched?</p>	<p>This feature is not supported in the current release. <b>Workaround:</b> Create each sub-part as a separate AOI.</p>
<p>When I'm drawing an AOI, sometimes I make an error and want to stop in the middle of drawing it and start over, or after I've drawn it, I want to delete the AOI and start over. Is there a way to do this?</p>	<p>To stop in the middle of drawing an AOI and start over, when using the <i>AOI Rectangle</i> tool, press the <b>Esc</b> key <i>without releasing the mouse button</i>. To start over when using the <i>AOI Polygon</i> tool, just</p>



press the **Esc** key.

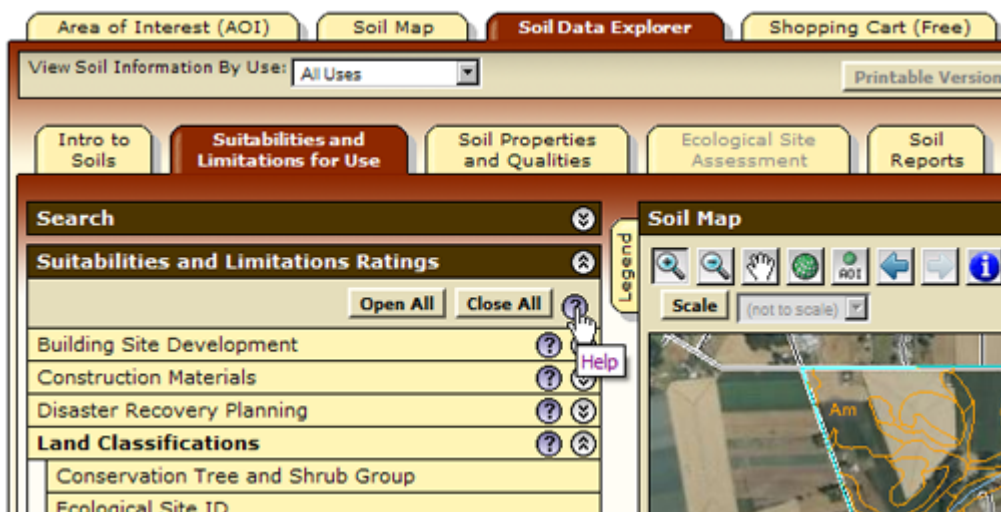
To delete an AOI after drawing it, click the **Clear AOI** button in the **Area of Interest Properties** panel.

## Interactive Map

Question	Answer
The aerial photos are too dark or look like patchwork. Is there anything I can do to make this more readable?	Though the aerial photography layer is much improved in release 2.1, there is no adjustment to improve the appearance of the aerial photos.  However, you can turn off the aerial photography layer — Click the <b>Legend</b> tab, scroll the Legend down to the “Aerial Photography” layer, and uncheck it.
Why are the water and road lines so far off the photo image?	The base map data layers used by Web Soil Survey come from multiple sources and were compiled at various scales, generally at a much coarser resolution than the soils data or the aerial photos, and they don’t always match perfectly. New map data layers have been integrated with Web Soil Survey in release 2.1, in order to align better with the soils data and the imagery.
Why can’t the Web Soil Survey development staff fix problems with these map data layers?	Web Soil Survey is only displaying these data layers to assist with navigation and as auxiliary information to the soils data. These layers are supplied by third parties, and NRCS does not have the authority to edit them. NRCS is only responsible for the soils data layers.
How can I find the source of the map data layers displayed in Web Soil Survey?	To see all available information on a map data layer:  <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Zoom the map to a scale where the layer you are interested in is visible.</li> <li>2. Open the <b>Legend</b> tab.</li> <li>3. Right click the name of the layer to pop-up the context menu.</li> <li>4. Click <b>View Layer Descriptions</b>.</li> <li>5. All available information about the source of the data layer is displayed. In some cases, the source of the data layer is not known, and <i>No descriptions available</i> is displayed.</li> </ol>
How can I find the date of aerial photography used in Web Soil Survey?	To get the date of the aerial photography for a particular spot:  <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Click the <i>Identify</i> tool on the map tool bar.</li> <li>2. Open the <b>Legend</b> tab.</li> <li>3. Set the “Aerial Photography” background layer as the active layer, by clicking the layer name (leave the checkbox checked, and just click the name “Aerial Photography”).</li> <li>4. Then click on the map. In the <b>Identify</b> panel below the map, you will see the date that the aerial photo you clicked was made.</li> </ol> <p>The aerial photography date(s) are also included on the Legend page of printable maps.</p>

## Soil Data Explorer

Question	Answer
<p>How do I print or download the soil data maps and tables?</p>	<p>Here are some basic instructions to get soil data from Web Soil Survey:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. First, create an area of interest (AOI). (See "How do I select the area for which I want to get soil information?" above.)</li> <li>2. Then, click the <b>Soil Map</b> tab.</li> <li>3. You will see the Soil Map for your AOI. Click the <b>Printable Version</b> button, and press <b>View</b> to create a PDF that you can download or print. For additional help, press the  question-mark icon in the <b>Printable Version</b> form.</li> <li>4. Then, click the <b>Soil Data Explorer</b> tab.</li> <li>5. The <b>Soil Data Explorer</b> tab contains five inner tabs:             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Intro to Soils</b></li> <li>2. <b>Suitabilities and Limitations for Use</b> (the default)</li> <li>3. <b>Soil Properties and Qualities</b></li> <li>4. <b>Ecological Site Assessment</b></li> <li>5. <b>Soil Reports</b></li> </ol> <p>On the left side <b>Suitabilities and Limitations for Use</b> tab are a number of "Folders", which you can click to open. You can find the data you want most easily using the <b>Search</b> feature, at the upper left corner of all Web Soil Survey tabs.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. Open <b>Recreational Development</b>, for example.</li> <li>7. The folders contain forms which you can fill out to get "Soil Ratings" (on the other inner tabs, other kinds of soil data are available). Click <b>Playgrounds</b> to open it.</li> <li>8. You can click <b>View Description</b> to see a description of this rating.</li> <li>9. Click <b>View Rating</b> to run the rating and view the data map and/or tables.</li> <li>10. Click the <b>Printable Version</b> button, and press <b>View</b> to create a PDF of the soil rating map and/or tables that you can download or print.</li> <li>11. Help for the <b>Suitabilities and Limitations for Use</b> tab, and for all the inner tabs, is available by clicking the  question-mark icon at the upper right of the folder panel.</li> </ol> </li> </ol>
<p>How do I get the description of a</p>	<p>Define your area of interest, then navigate to the <b>Soil Map</b> tab. On the left side, find your soil map unit</p>



<p>soil map unit without printing a soil map?</p>	<p>in the Map Unit Legend. Click on the map unit name to display the description for that map unit in a dialog. The Map Unit Description dialog also contains a <b>Printable Version</b> button.</p> <p>You can also view and print a report containing all Map Unit Descriptions for your AOI. Navigate to the <b>Soil Data Explorer</b> tab, then the <b>Soil Reports</b> inner tab. On the left side, in the <b>AOI Inventory</b> folder, view the <b>Map Unit Description</b> report.</p>																				
<p>What is the source of the data presented in Web Soil Survey?</p>	<p>The data presented by Web Soil Survey comes from the <a href="#">Soil Data Mart</a>, which serves the official NRCS soil data for the U.S.</p>																				
<p>How can I get soil tabular and spatial data in a database format?</p>	<p>This data is available in various forms, depending on your needs:</p>																				
	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Scope</th> <th>Link</th> <th>Scale</th> <th>Data Format</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>                     User-specified AOI, up to 10,000 acres                 </td> <td> <a href="#">Web Soil Survey</a> — click the <b>Download Soils Data</b> link in the main navigation bar.                 </td> <td>                     SSURGO (1:24,000)                 </td> <td>                     Spatial:                     <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ESRI Shapefile</li> </ul>                     Tabular:                     <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ASCII<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Pre-imported into Microsoft Access SSURGO Template Database</li> </ul> </td> </tr> <tr> <td>                     Soil Survey Area<sup>2</sup> </td> <td> <a href="#">Soil Data Mart</a>  <a href="#">Geospatial Data Gateway</a> </td> <td>                     SSURGO (1:24,000)                 </td> <td>                     Spatial:                     <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ESRI Shapefile</li> <li>• ESRI ArcInfo Interchange</li> <li>• ESRI ArcInfo Coverage</li> </ul>                     Tabular:                     <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ASCII<sup>1</sup></li> </ul> </td> </tr> <tr> <td>                     State, or entire U.S.                 </td> <td> <a href="#">Soil Data Mart - U.S. General Soil Map</a>  <a href="#">Geospatial Data Gateway</a> </td> <td>                     STATSGO (1:250,000)                 </td> <td>                     Spatial:                     <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ESRI Shapefile</li> </ul>                     Tabular:                     <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ASCII<sup>1</sup></li> </ul> </td> </tr> <tr> <td>                     User-specified AOI, up to 2,500,000 acres                 </td> <td> <a href="#">Soil Data Access</a><sup>3</sup> </td> <td>                     SSURGO (1:24,000)                 </td> <td>                     Spatial:                     <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ESRI Shapefile</li> <li>• GML</li> </ul>                     Tabular:<sup>4</sup> </td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Scope	Link	Scale	Data Format	User-specified AOI, up to 10,000 acres	<a href="#">Web Soil Survey</a> — click the <b>Download Soils Data</b> link in the main navigation bar.	SSURGO (1:24,000)	Spatial: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ESRI Shapefile</li> </ul> Tabular: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ASCII<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Pre-imported into Microsoft Access SSURGO Template Database</li> </ul>	Soil Survey Area <sup>2</sup>	<a href="#">Soil Data Mart</a> <a href="#">Geospatial Data Gateway</a>	SSURGO (1:24,000)	Spatial: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ESRI Shapefile</li> <li>• ESRI ArcInfo Interchange</li> <li>• ESRI ArcInfo Coverage</li> </ul> Tabular: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ASCII<sup>1</sup></li> </ul>	State, or entire U.S.	<a href="#">Soil Data Mart - U.S. General Soil Map</a> <a href="#">Geospatial Data Gateway</a>	STATSGO (1:250,000)	Spatial: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ESRI Shapefile</li> </ul> Tabular: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ASCII<sup>1</sup></li> </ul>	User-specified AOI, up to 2,500,000 acres	<a href="#">Soil Data Access</a> <sup>3</sup>	SSURGO (1:24,000)	Spatial: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ESRI Shapefile</li> <li>• GML</li> </ul> Tabular: <sup>4</sup>
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Entire U.S.	We can provide a backup copy of the entire Soil Data Mart database. <sup>3</sup> Contact us at <a href="mailto:soilshotline@lin.usda.gov">soilshotline@lin.usda.gov</a>	SSURGO (1:24,000)	Microsoft SQL Server and ESRI ArcSDE

Notes:

1. Soil tabular data in an ASCII format that can be imported into a Microsoft Access “SSURGO Template Database” or pre-imported into the national SSURGO Template Database, or for some states, into a custom SSURGO Template Database.
2. You can determine data availability for soil survey areas using the [Soil Survey Area Data Availability Status Map](#).
3. The Soil Data Access and SDM backup copy options require considerably more technical expertise than the others.
4. For details, refer to the [Soil Data Access Query Guide](#).

To utilize this data, you will need:

- For the spatial data, ArcGIS or other software that can read shapefiles.
- For the tabular data, Microsoft Access.
- To use the spatial data in conjunction with the tabular data, the [Soil Data Viewer](#) application.
- For a Soil Data Mart backup copy, Microsoft SQL Server and ESRI ArcSDE.

## Printable Maps and Reports

Question	Answer
I cannot produce a printable version of the soil map. I have tried several times, and each time it says “Generating printable version...”, but when it’s done, no printable version appears.	You may have a popup blocker installed. See <a href="#">“Web Soil Survey doesn’t work if you have popups blocked”</a> on the Known Problems page.
What is the difference between <b>Printable Version</b> and <b>Add to Shopping Cart</b> ?	<p>You can print or save soils data on a page-by-page basis using the <b>Printable Version</b> feature.</p> <p>You can also add maps and data to a “Shopping Cart” for inclusion in a single Custom Soil Resource Report. It’s an easy way to get one polished report containing all relevant information for your area of interest. Any custom report you create on your Shopping Cart is free of charge — we just used the well-known internet shopping analogy for collecting and ordering your information.</p> <p>To try out this feature, define your area of interest (AOI), and navigate to the <b>Shopping Cart</b> tab. In the <b>Table of Contents</b> panel, notice several report items available by default: <i>Cover, Preface, Contents, How Soil Surveys Are</i></p>

*Made, Soil Map, Map Unit Legend, Map Unit Descriptions, and References.*  
You can preview items in your Shopping Cart by clicking the item's title in the **Table of Contents**. To make the preview go away, click the title again.

You can add additional information to your report as desired. From the inner tabs of the **Soil Data Explorer** tab, view information and then click **Add to Shopping Cart**. In this way, you can assemble a report customized to your needs.

When you have collected all the data you want in your report, press the **Check Out** button and choose *Get Now* or *Download Later*.

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