USDA

United States Department of Agriculture

2016 Soils Planner

Land Capability Classes—
Onsite Evaluation for Soil Health and Productivity

Words From the Chief

Helping People Help the Land

For more than 80 years, NRCS has helped farmers and ranchers implement science-based conservation practices to improve the health of their lands and boost production while at the same time protecting soil and water resources for the future.

In order to determine the best practices for the land, NRCS uses a system to categorize the soil based on its potential for healthy productivity and any limitations to productivity, like erosion, steep slopes, and high water tables. This system groups soils into one of eight land capability classes. Identifying a soil's capability class helps NRCS staff provide guidance to our customers to help them make informed decisions.

This year's Soils Planner gives a snapshot of the various soil classifications and potential conservation practices that can be used in the field to improve land productivity and soil health. If you are a farmer or rancher looking to make improvements, I encourage you to contact your local NRCS field office to get started. To learn more about soils and soil health, visit our website at www.nrcs.usda.gov.

Jason Weller
Chief, USDA–Natural Resources Conservation Service

USDA United States Department of Agriculture

NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

Soil Science Society of America (SSSA)

With the celebration of the 2015 International Year of Soils, scientists, farmers, and public officials have intensified the discussion on how to feed the world's population while enhancing the soil's ability to provide important ecosystem services. Many conversations have focused on expanding the land area for agricultural production and intensifying crop production on existing agricultural lands. Increases in production would depend on the suitability of the land for agriculture compared to other uses, such as wildlife, forest, or recreational uses, and also on the implementation of improved management practices for soil, crops, and water.

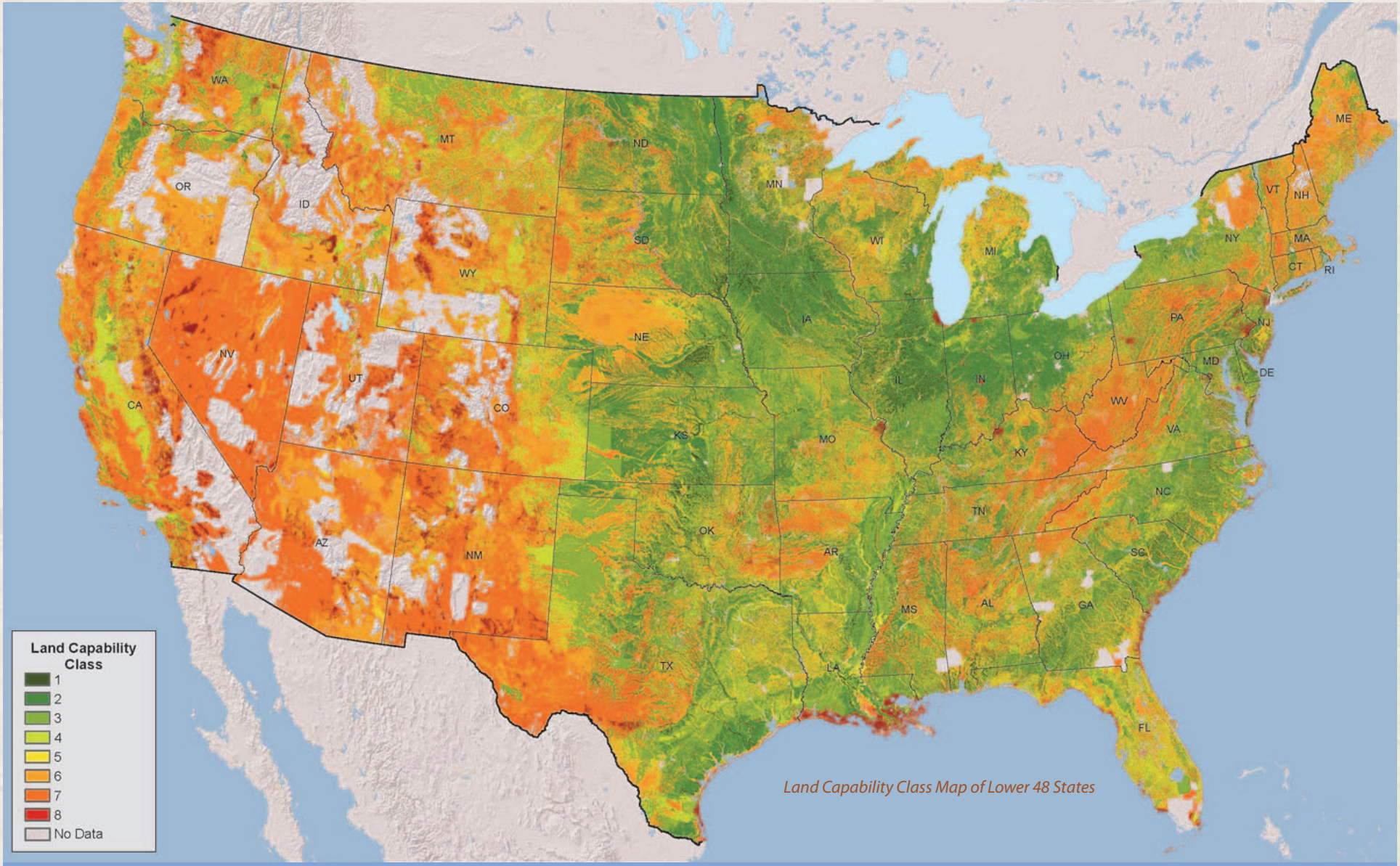
For decades, the soil science community has worked on the development of tools that support the productive and sustainable use of our lands. Web Soil Survey, land capability classes, and conservation practice standards are now extensively used by agricultural and conservation professionals to evaluate the suitability of soil, its susceptibility to land use practices, and its capability to support sustainable land use.

The Soil Science Society of America (SSSA) is an educational organization with more than 6,000 scientists and professionals in over 80 countries. The Society is committed to the advancement of soil science and the promotion of soils as fundamental to life. SSSA supports the education and research needed to protect and understand this natural resource for the health and welfare of our planet. We are pleased to continue our active partnership with the USDA–Natural Resources Conservation Service in producing educational materials, such as the 2016 Soils Planner, for our members, the public, and the science community.

Harold M. van Es
President, Soil Science Society of America
www.soils.org

Web Soil Survey (WSS)

Web Soil Survey (WSS) provides maps of land capability classes (LCC) through land analysis of soil characteristics. The classes can be subdivided into capability subclasses to indicate further limitations, such as climate, erosion, wetness, or shallow soils.



Land Capability Class Map of Lower 48 States

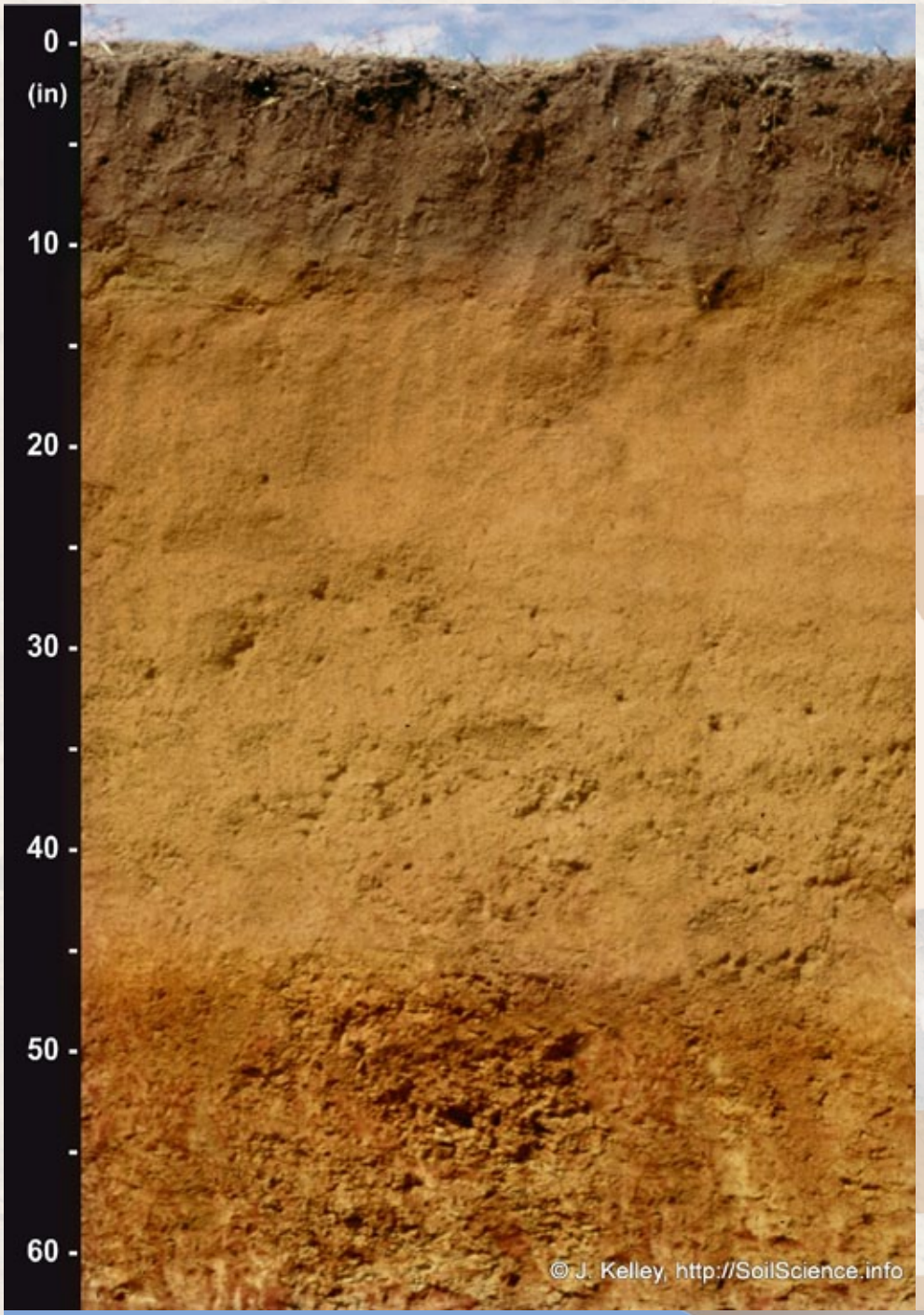
1930s Dust Bowl

Since the Dust Bowl of the 1930s, USDA, and especially NRCS, has needed a means of making judgments about the causes of soil erosion in order to operate programs designed to conserve soil and protect water quality. The solution to this need has been the land capability classification. For over 50 years, the Natural Resources Conservation Service has used land capability classification as a tool for planning conservation measures and practices so that land can be farmed without serious deterioration of soil health from erosion or other causes.

Land capability classification is a system of grouping soils primarily on the basis of their capability to produce common cultivated crops and pasture plants without deteriorating over a long period of time. It provides information on the suitability of soils for common field crops. Soils are grouped according to their limitations for cultivation based on the decline of soil resources when used for cropping and the soil's response to management measures. The criteria to group soils includes neither expensive land-forming practices that change slope, depth, or other characteristics of the soils nor major reclamation.

There are currently eight land capability classes, which are designated by numbers 1 through 8. The numbers indicate progressively greater limitations and narrower choices for practical use. The first four classes relate to arable land. A given area is assigned a particular class depending on landscape location, slope steepness, depth, texture, pH, salinity, and other characteristics of the soil. The remaining four classes relate to areas that are generally unsuitable for cropland but that may be suitable for pasture, range, woodland, wildlife, recreation, or esthetic purposes if adapted perennial vegetation is maintained.

Within the broad classes are subclasses that signify special limitations. The subclasses are identified by a small letter e, w, s, or c. The letter e indicates a risk of erosion unless close-growing plant cover is maintained; w indicates water in or on the soil interferes with plant growth or cultivation; s indicates a soil limited mainly because it is shallow, droughty, or stony; and c indicates a climate that is very cold or very dry.



Class I

Class I soils have the widest range of possible land uses and fewest limitations. They are the most productive soils and are typically considered prime farmland. They have a low hazard of erosion. Areas are generally flat (slopes do not exceed 2 percent).

Common NRCS Conservation Practice Standards:

- Conservation Crop Rotation
- Cover Crop
- Nutrient Management
- Residue Management

January 2016

December '15

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
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27	28	29	30	31		

February '16

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14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29					

March '16

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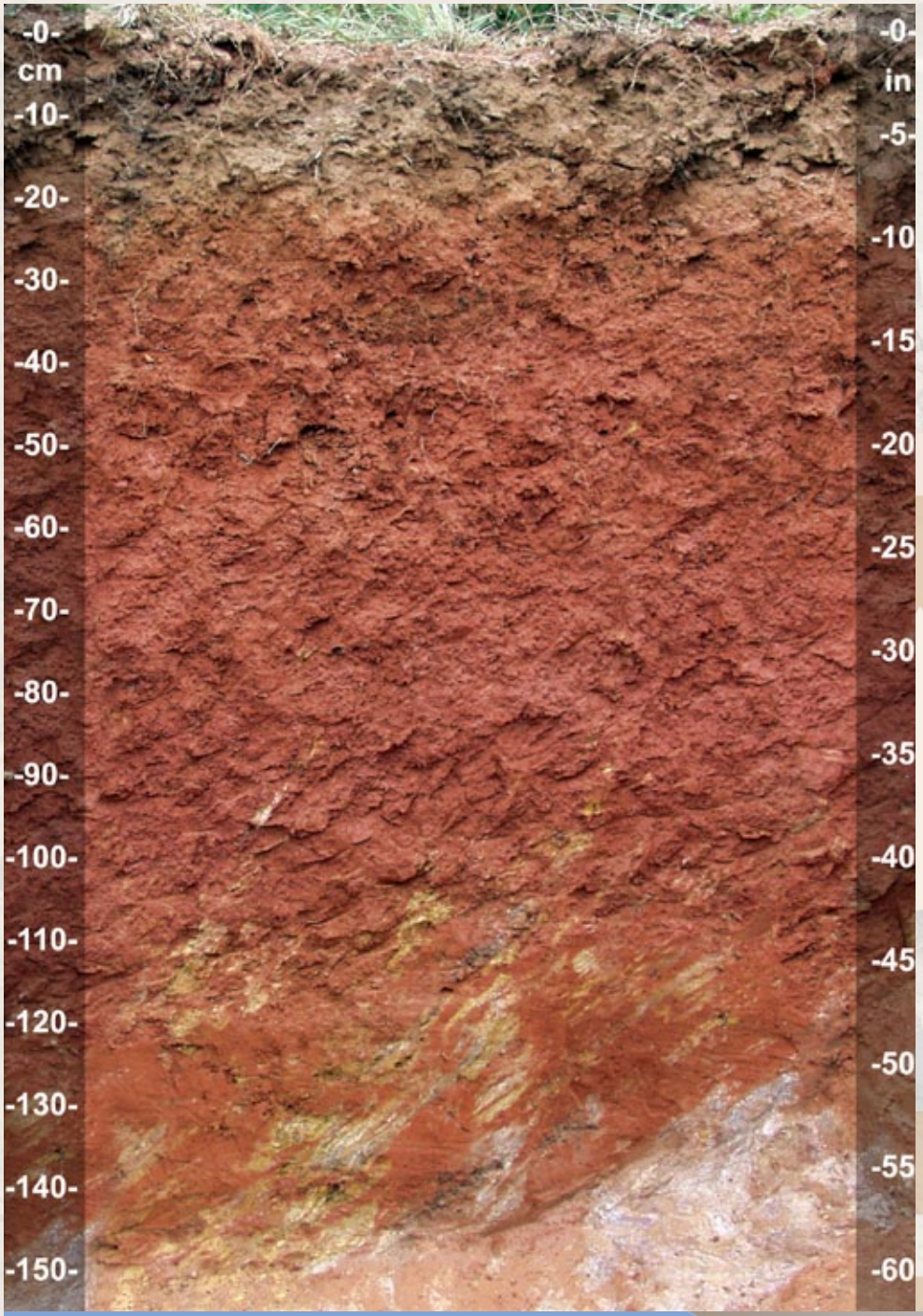
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
					1 New Year's Day	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18 Martin Luther King Day	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31	NOTES Year					



Class IIe

Class IIe soils have erosion that limits the choice of crops or plants unless close-growing plant cover is maintained. Additional conservation practices are needed for cultivation. Slopes range from 2 to 6 percent.

Common NRCS Conservation Practice Standards:

- Conservation Crop Rotation
- Cover Crop
- Residue Management No-till/Direct Seed/ Strip Till
- Nutrient Management
- Grassed Waterway

February 2016

January '16

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
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17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31						

March '16

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20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		

April '16

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17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	1	2 Groundhog Day	3	4	5	6
7	8 Chinese New Year	9	10	11	12 Abraham Lincoln's Birthday	13
14 Valentine's Day	15 President's Day	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29					

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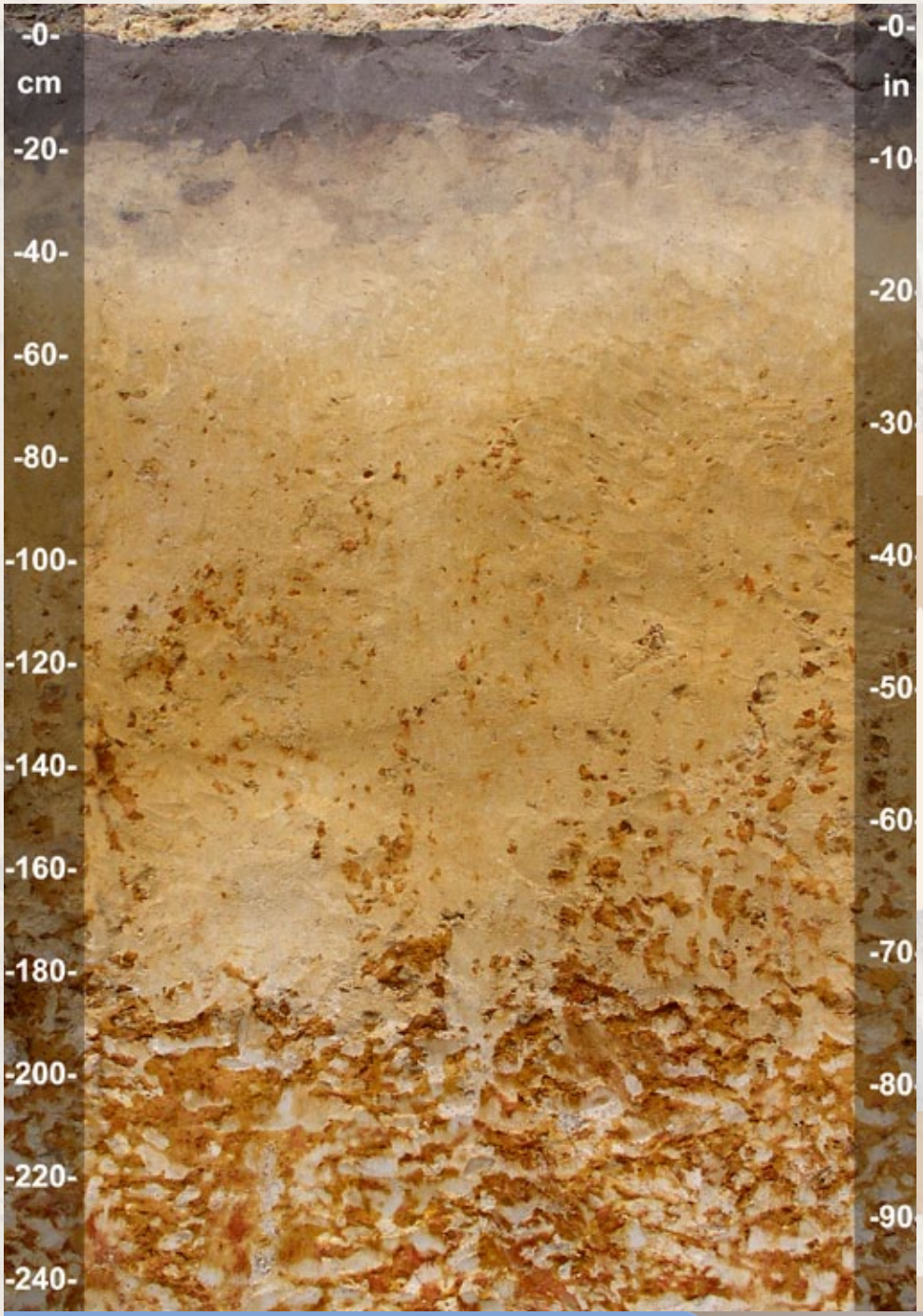

Class IIs

Class IIs soils are typically limited because they are shallow, droughty, or stony. They can be productive if limitations affecting the root zone are overcome. Compaction due to tillage or field traffic can degrade soil quality and decrease soil workability.

Common NRCS Conservation Practice Standards:

- Conservation Crop Rotation
- Residue Management No-till/Direct Seed/Strip Till
- Cover Crop
- Nutrient Management

March 2016

February '16

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
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April '16

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17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30

May '16

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15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13 Daylight Saving	14	15	16	17 St. Patrick's Day	18	19
20 Vernal Equinox	21	22	23	24	25 Good Friday	26
27 Easter	28	29	30	31		

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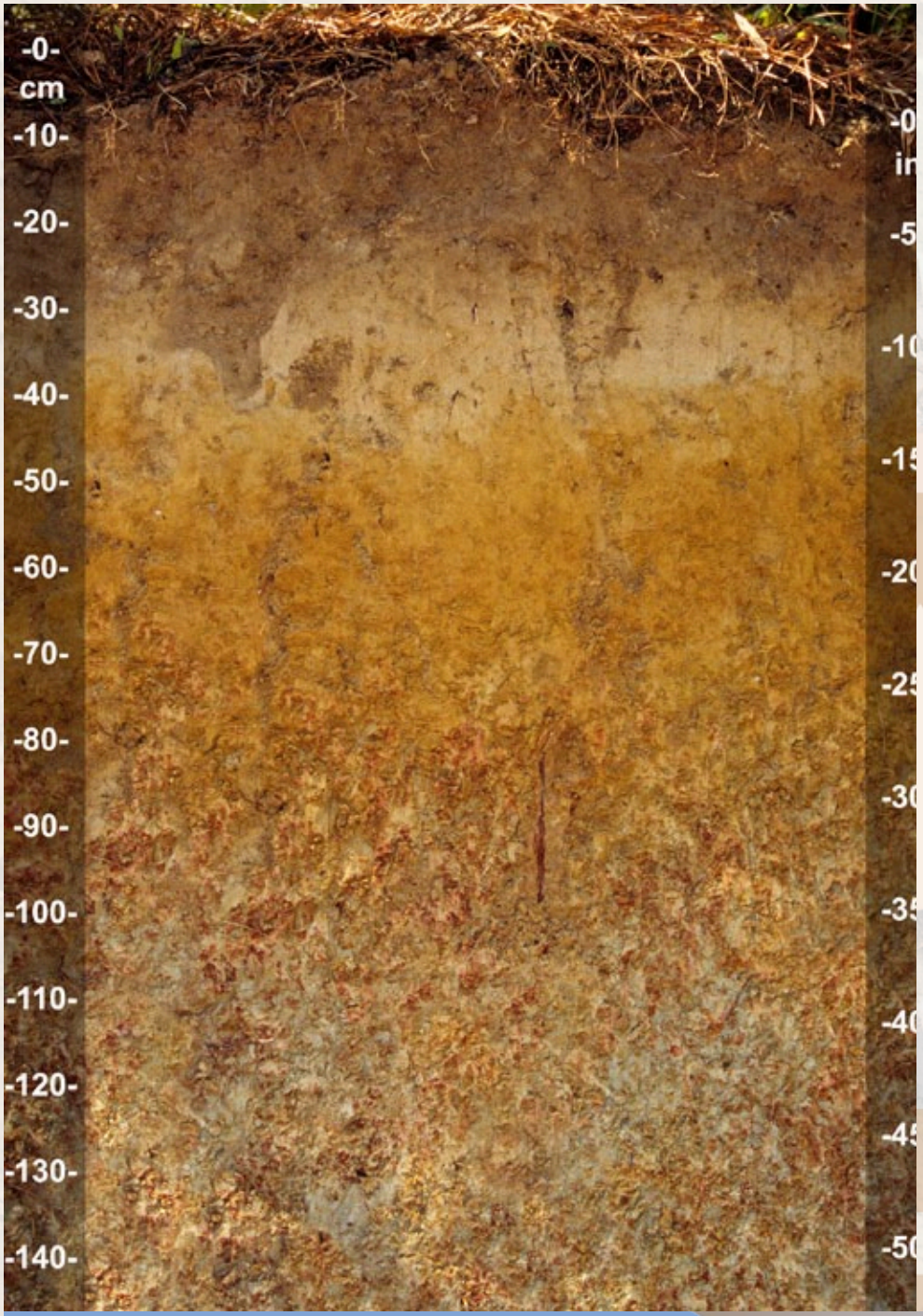

Class IIw

Class IIw soils have a low available water capacity and a layer within a depth of 40 inches that limits the root zone. Depth to the water table may limit crop production. Water in or on the soil surface interferes with plant growth or cultivation. In some areas, the wetness can be partially controlled by artificial drainage.

Common NRCS Conservation Practice Standards:

- Conservation Crop Rotation
- Cover Crop
- Irrigation Water Management (where irrigated)
- Drainage Water Management (where surface water ponding or saturation near the surface are a concern)
- Nutrient Management

April 2016

March '16

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
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20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		

May '16

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22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

June '16

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12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30		

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
					1 April Fool's Day	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15 Taxes Due	16
17	18	19	20	21	22 Earth Day	23 Passover
24	25	26	27 Admin Assist Day 81st Anniversary of NRCS	28	29	30

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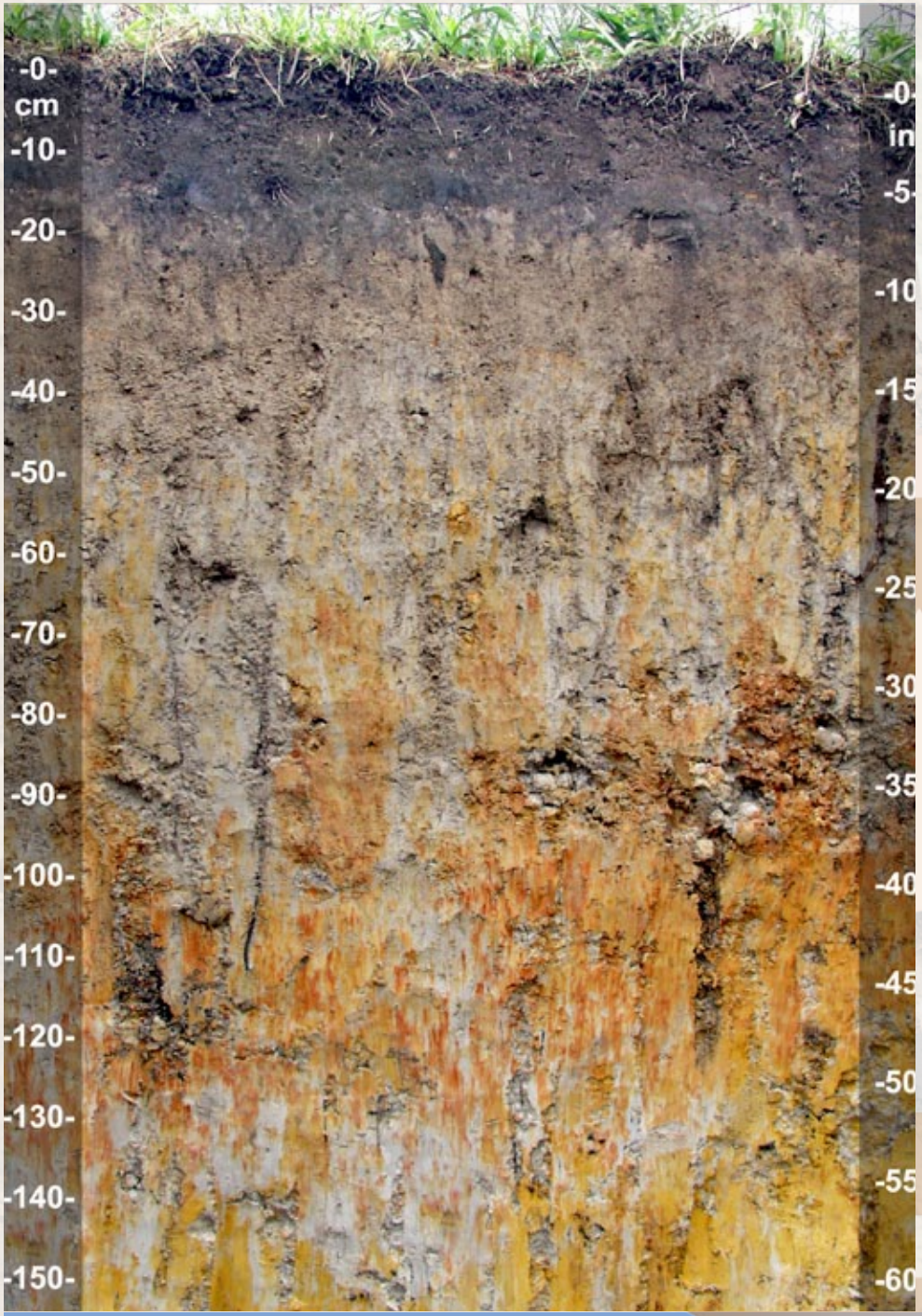

Class IIIw

Class IIIw soils have moderate or severe limitations for crop production, including slow permeability and a water table within a depth of 50 centimeters. They have an increased potential for erosion and off-site transport of nutrients. Slopes range from 6 to 10 percent.

Common NRCS Conservation Practice Standards:

- Conservation Crop Rotation
- Contour Buffer Strips
- Nutrient Management
- Terrace

May 2016

April '16

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30

June '16

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
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12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30		

July '16

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17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31						

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8 Mother's Day	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30 Memorial Day	31	1	2	3	4

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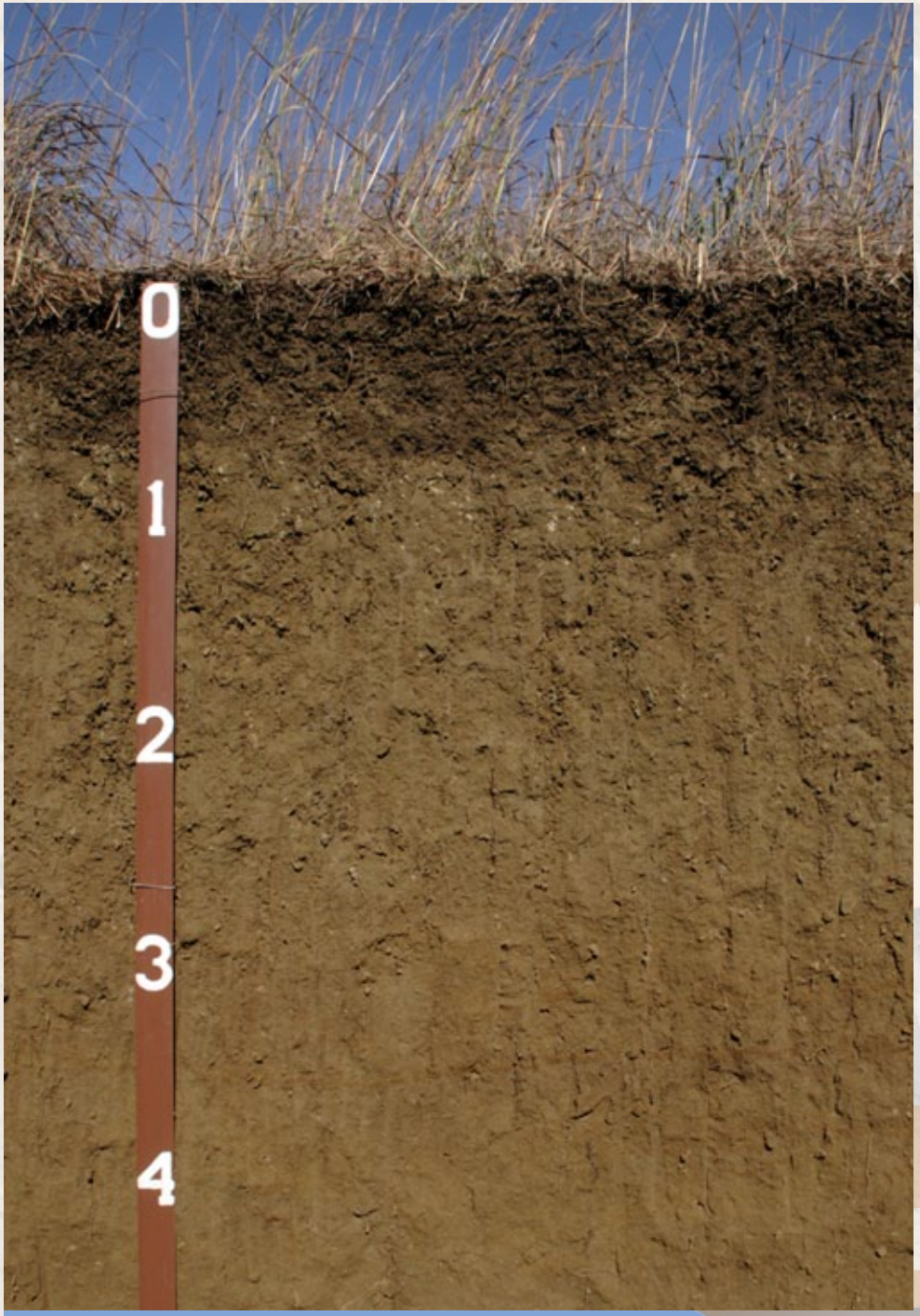

Photo - Mike Kucera

Class IVe

Class IVe soils have no rooting restrictions but are on steep slopes and subject to water erosion. They are marginally suited to crop production. Extensive conservation practices are needed to maintain soil organic matter and control concentrated flow erosion, sheet and rill erosion, and wind erosion. They are best suited to permanent hay, pasture, or range. Slopes range from 10 to 15 percent.

Common NRCS Conservation Practice Standards:

- Stripcropping
- Terraces
- Pasture & Hay Planting
- Range Planting

June 2016

May '16

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

July '16

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
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31						

August '16

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21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			1	2	3	4
5	6 Ramadan Begins	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14 Flag Day	15	16	17	18
19 Father's Day	20 June Solstice	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30		

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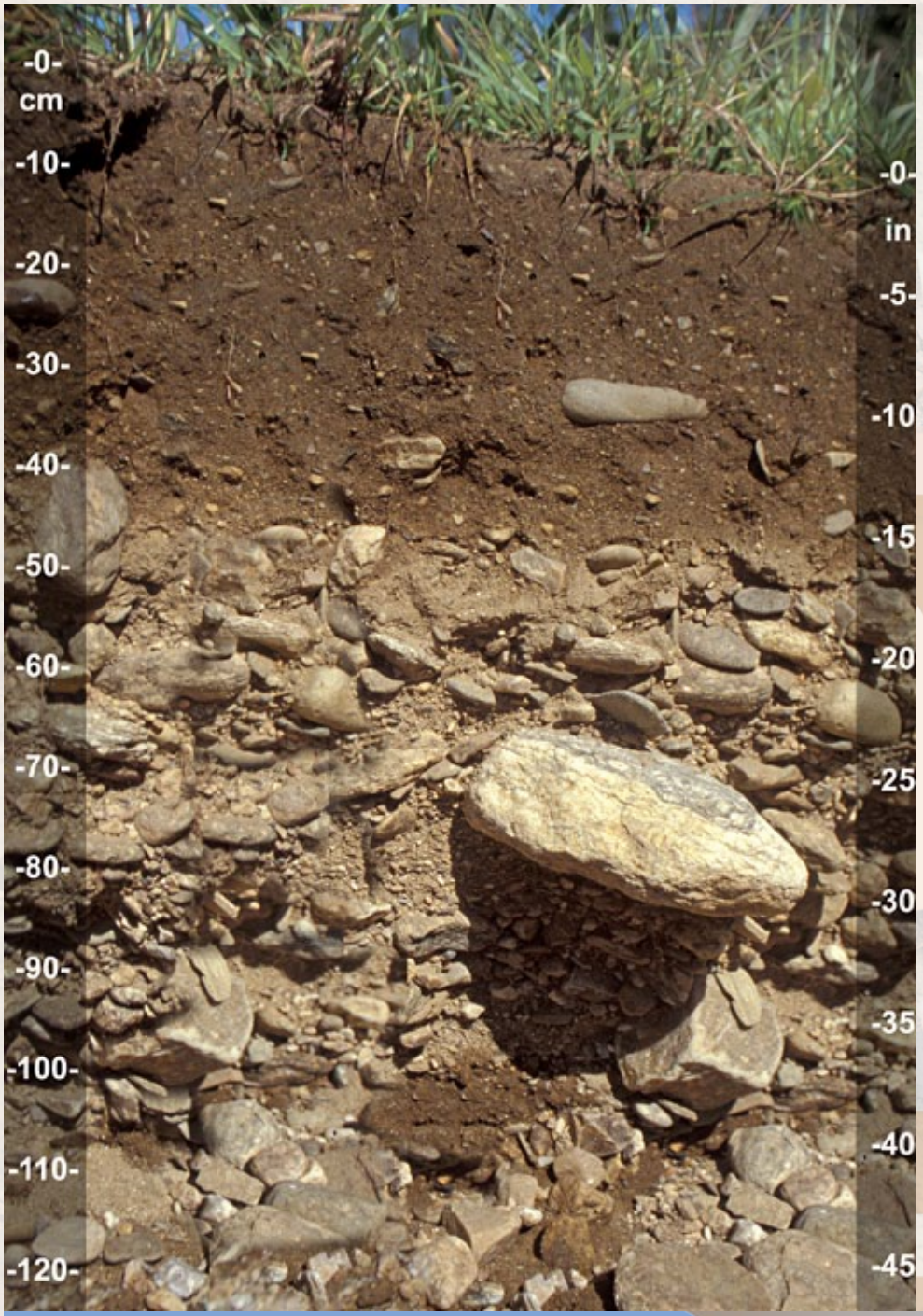

Class IVs

Class IVs soils have very severe limitations but can be used for limited-tillage crop production. They have an increased potential for sheet, rill, and wind erosion and off-site transport of nutrients. Intensive conservation practices are needed to control erosion and runoff. Slopes range from 10 to 15 percent.

Common NRCS Conservation Practice Standards:

- Residue and Tillage Management, No Till/Strip Till/Direct Seed
- Riparian Forest Buffer
- Forage and Biomass Planting
- Tree/Shrub Establishment

July 2016

June '16

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
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August '16

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28	29	30	31			

September '16

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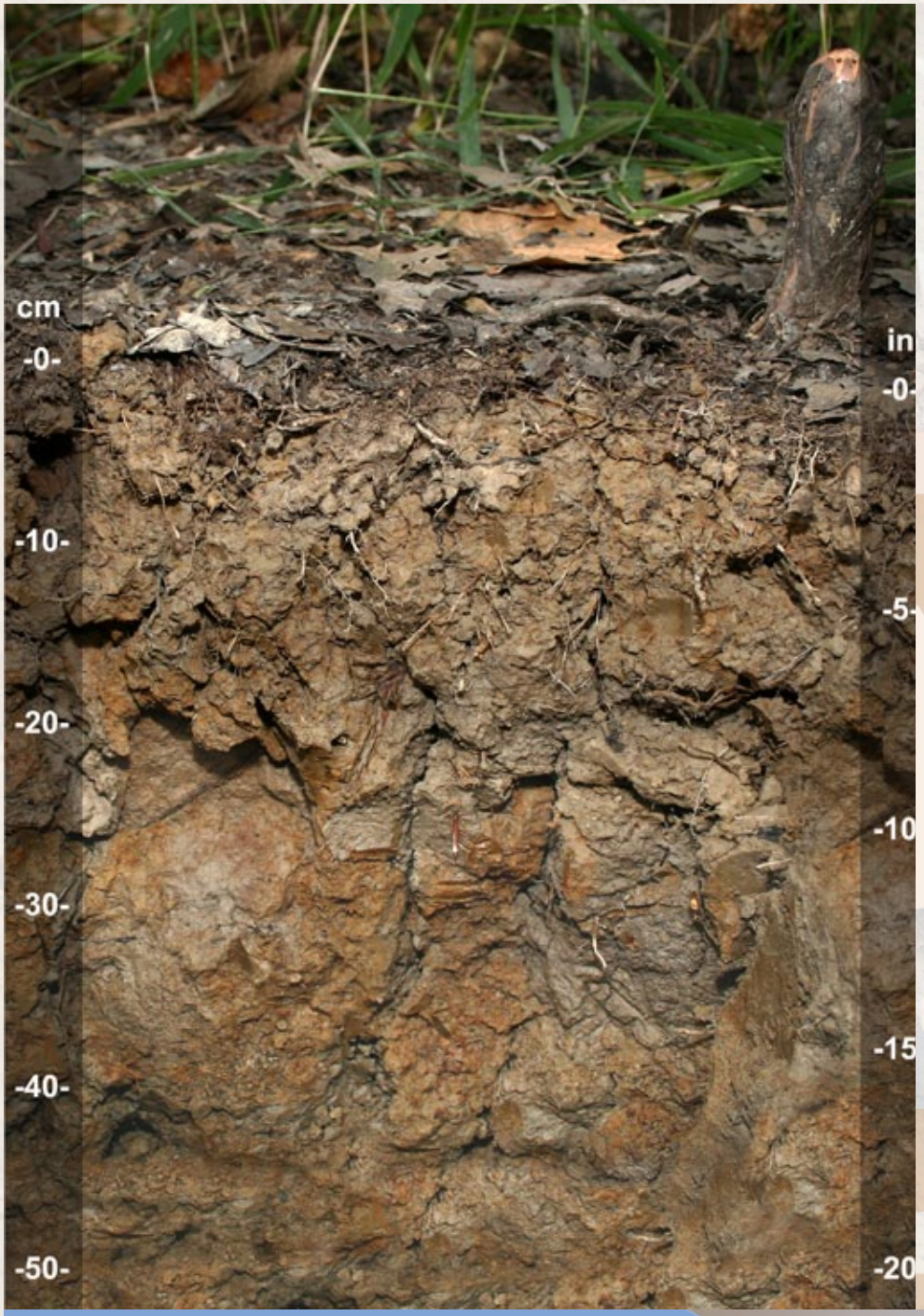
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
					1	2
3	4 Independence Day	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24 Parents' Day	25	26	27	28	29	30
31	NOTES					



Class IVw

Class IVw soils have severe susceptibility to water erosion or wind erosion and may be poorly drained. They are poorly suited to crop production. Areas with shallow water tables require intensive drainage for agricultural use.

Common NRCS Conservation Practice Standards:

- Multi-Story Cropping
- Pasture & Hay Planting
- Tree/Shrub Establishment
- Surface Drain, Main or Lateral

August 2016

July '16

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
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September '16

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October '16

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16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
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7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19 Aviation Day	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			3

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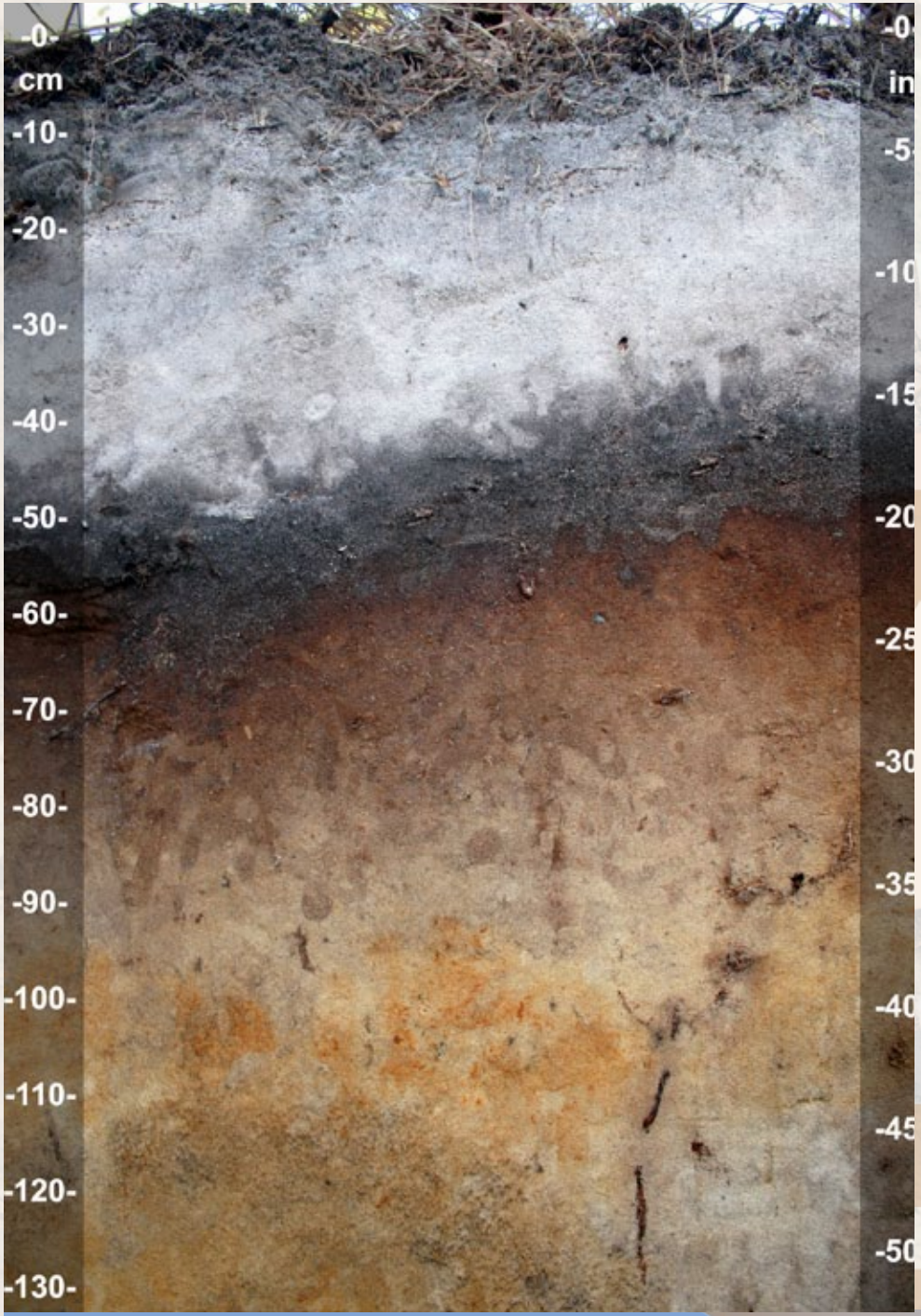

Class V

Class V soils are depositional areas that remain in their natural condition with little or no erosion. They are stony and may be wet in some areas. Ponding, flooding, a seasonal high water table, seeps, or drifted snow can cause excess wetness. Cultivation of the common crops is not feasible, but pastures can be improved.

Common NRCS Conservation Practice Standards:

- Silvopasture Establishment
- Tree/Shrub Establishment
- Wetland Restoration
- Wetland Enhancement

September 2016

August '16

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
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28	29	30	31			

October '16

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30	31					

November '16

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27	28	29	30			

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				1	2	3
4	5 Labor Day	6	7	8	9	10
11 Patriot Day Grandparents' Day	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22 Autumnal Equinox	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	

NOTES

Class VIe

Class VIe soils are unsuited to row crops but can be used for pasture or hayland, range, woodland, or wildlife habitat. They are limited by a severe hazard of erosion, stoniness, or both. They are also typically shallow to a water table. Slopes range from 15 to 25 percent.

Common NRCS Conservation Practice Standards:

- Conservation Cover
- Forage and Biomass Planting
- Prescribed Grazing
- Forest Stand Improvement

October 2016

September '16

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
				1	2	3
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11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	

November '16

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20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30			

December '16

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25	26	27	28	29	30	31

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
						1
2	3 Rosh Hashanah	4	5	6	7	8
9	10 Columbus Day	11	12 Yom Kippur	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24 United Nations Day	25	26	27	28	29
30	31 Halloween	NOTES				

Class VIIs

Class VIIs soils have very severe limitations for crop production. They are very shallow and very stony. Slopes are more than 25 percent.

Common NRCS Conservation Practice Standards:

- Conservation Cover
- Contour Orchard and Other Perennial Crops
- Restoration and Management of Rare or Declining Habitats

November 2016

October '16

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					

December '16

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
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4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

January '17

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		1	2	3	4	5
6 Daylight Saving	7	8	9	10	11 Veterans Day	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24 Thanksgiving	25	26
27	28	29	30			

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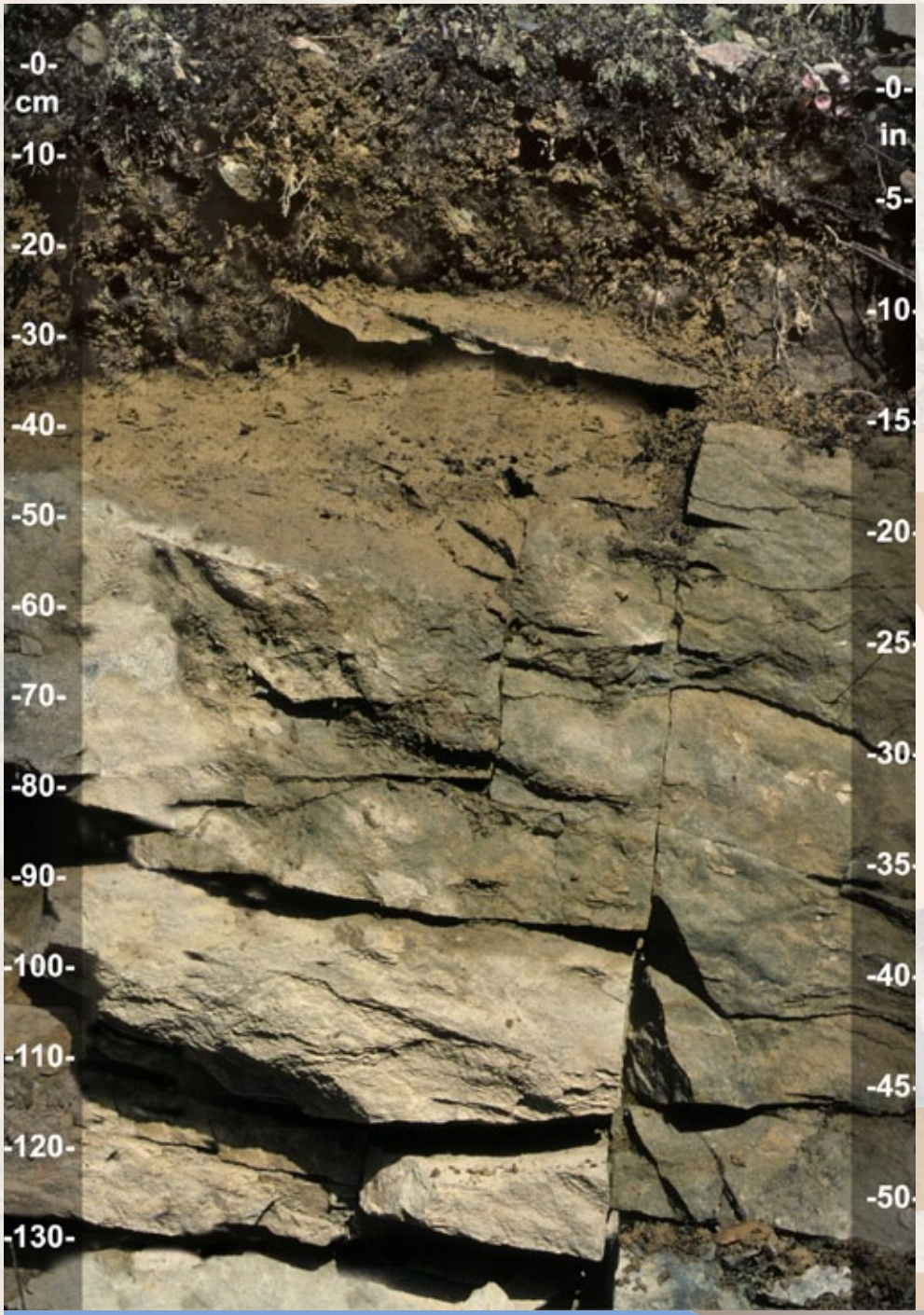

Class VIII

Class VIII soils have the most severe limitations for agriculture and the narrowest range of uses. They are best managed for forest, environmental protection, recreation, wildlife, and esthetics.

Common Conservation NRCS Practice Standards:

- Tree/Shrub Establishment
- Forest Stand Improvement
- Upland Wildlife Habitat Management

December 2016

November '16

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30			

January '17

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

February '17

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			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28				

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				1	2	3
4	5 World Soil Day	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21 December Solstice	22	23	24 Christmas Eve
25 Christmas Day Chanukah	26 Kwanzaa Begins	27	28	29	30	31 New Year's Eve

NOTES

2016 Events

January 2016

January 30–February 3: National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) Annual National Meeting, Reno, NV

February 2016

February 4-5: Soil Survey and Land Resource Workshop, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX

March 2016

March 29–April 1: Austin International Conference on Soil Modeling, Austin, TX

April 2016

April 3–8: National Soil Judging Contest, Manhattan, KS

April 21: 81st Anniversary of NRCS

May 2016

May 31–June 2: International Conference on Conservation Agriculture and Sustainable Land Use, Budapest, Hungary

June 2016

June 20-25: South Region National Cooperative Soil Survey Conference, San Juan, PR

July 2016

July 11-15: Central Region National Cooperative Soil Survey Conference, Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, IL

July 24–27: Soil and Water Conservation Society (SWCS) International Annual Conference, Louisville, KY

July 25-29: West Region National Cooperative Soil Survey Conference, Fairbanks, AK

August 2016

August 7–12: 101st Ecological Society of America (ESA) Annual Meeting, Ft. Lauderdale, FL

September 2016

September 25–28: The Geological Society of America (GSA) 2016 Annual Meeting, Denver, CO

November 2016

November 6–9: Soil Science Society of America Annual Meeting, Phoenix, AZ

December 2016

December 5: World Soil Day

December 12–16: American Geophysical Union Annual Meetings, San Francisco, CA

Reference & Photo Credits

Soil Science Society of America. Copyright 2012. Know Soil, Know Life. David Lindbo, Deb A. Kozlowski, and Clay Robinson, editors. Doi:10.2136/2012.knowsoil.c5

Helms, Douglas. 1992. The Development of the Land Capability Classification. In Readings in the History of the Soil Conservation Service. Natural Resources Conservation Service, Washington, DC.

USDA–Natural Resources Conservation Service Field Office Technical Guide, Section 4, Practice Standards and Specifications. *http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/technical/fotg/*

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Peter F. Yeo (University Botanic Garden)
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CONSERVATION PRACTICE INDEX STANDARDS AND SPECIFICATIONS

File conservation practices in Section IV according to this index. An asterisk (*) by the practice name denotes an available job sheet. See Conservation Practice Index Job Sheet and Support Document list.

Area Office technical guides should contain all standards and specifications. If Asst. State Conservationists for Field Operations and District Conservationists agree that a practice is not applicable to a field office, retention of that standard and specification is optional. Such practices will be lined through on the field office index and marked N/A.

Practice Name and Unit * *An asterisck (*) indicates an available Job Sheet*	Code	Date of Standard	Supplement or Specs. Date	Date of Notekeeping	Lifespan (years)
Access Control (ac) *	472	10/11			10
Access Road (ft) *	560	04/11	02/08	02/08	10
Agrichemical Handling Facility (no)	309	05/09			15
Agricultural Secondary Containment Facility (no)	710	04/11			15
Alley Cropping (ac) *	311	12/11			15
Amendments for Treatment of Agricultural Waste (au)	591	06/06			1
Anaerobic Digestor (no)	366	05/10			25
Animal Mortality Facility (no)	316	04/12			15
Animal Trails and Walkways (ft)	575	04/11	02/08	02/08	10
Aquaculture Ponds (ac)	397	04/12			10
Aquatic Organism Passage (mi)	396	04/12			5
Bedding (ac) *	310	04/11			3
Brush Management (ac) *	314	09/10			10
Channel Bed Stabilization (ft)	584	10/11	08/05		10
Clearing and Snagging (ft)	326	04/11	12/06	12/06	5
Composting Facility (no)	317	02/04	02/04		15
Conservation Cover (ac) *	327	12/11			5
Conservation Crop Rotation (ac) *	328	02/12			1
Constructed Wetland (ac)	656	04/11			15
Contour Buffer Strips (ac) *	332	10/11			5
Contour Farming (ac) *	330	02/09			5
Contour Orchard and Other Fruit Area (ac) *	331	10/11			10
Cover Crop (ac) *	340	04/12	01/13		1
Critical Area Planting (ac) *	342	03/13			10
Cross Wind Trap Strips (ac) *	589C	07/11			5
Dam (no)	402	10/11			15
Dam, Diversion (no)	348	10/11			15
Deep Tillage (ac) *	324	10/11			1
Dike (ft)	356	12/06			20
Diversion (ft)	362	04/11	08/05	08/05	10
Drainage Water Management (ac)	554	05/09			1
Dry Hydrant (no)	432	04/12	09/99		15

Helping People Help the Land

Our Mission: Helping People Help the Land

Our Vision: Productive Lands, Healthy Environment

Helping people help the land and helping people understand soil science and its importance in land management and conservation are important goals for the Natural Resources Conservation Service. Farmers, agricultural producers, communities, and local governments work with NRCS State Offices and local USDA Service Centers to help them protect natural resources and maintain productivity on working lands.

To find out more about the soils in your State, county, or local community, visit the National Cooperative Soil Survey website at http://soils.usda.gov/. Click on the Web Soil Survey. For more information about natural resources and conservation in your own backyard, visit NRCS at http://www.nrcs.usda.gov. To help with conservation, you can volunteer locally by calling 1-888-LANDCARE

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For information on Soil Health and Conservation Planning in your own State, visit http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/technical/fotg/. Go to the Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG) for your State and click on Section IV—Practice Standards and Specifications for Conservation Practices.

Land capability classes (LCC) categorize soils based on wetness, erosion, climate, and other limitations affecting their suitability for cultivation. The system provides information on land uses best suited for each capability class. It also provides information on special measures, such as soil erosion control and soil health improvement practices, necessary to sustain productivity.

PA # 2188
January 2016

USDA United States Department of Agriculture

Soil Science Society of America

NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE