

## An Online Tool to Assist in the Development of Your Woodland Management Plan

## by Doug McLaren

Soils found on your property eventually define your individual land-use planning options, which can include woodland management. Many individuals beginning the process of developing a woodland plan usually have visions that far exceed most woodlands potential, so it is important to understand the correlation between soils and the trees growing on them. Making a complete plan for your woodlands should incorporate as many resources as possible and the Web Soil Survey (WSS) is that online tool that can assist in designing a woodland plan that relates soils with trees.

The Web Soil Survey provides data and information concerning soils and is operated by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). The information found at the Web site is the same contained in the older paper version referred to as the "soil survey." They both contain information and predictions of soil behavior for selected land uses. The online version of the WSS has the same information but provides more illustrative "what-if" examples.

The WSS provides numerous options for land-use planning, especially for woodland management. Comparisons of species production potential versus site provides the user some insight as to which species are best suited for future management opportunities simply based on soil characteristics. Trees and their future potential have a direct correlation to the soil resulting from geology, landforms, relief, climate, and the natural vegetation of the area.

The WSS requires only several steps in the development of a plan for the location of interest. The first step requires you to locate and define the property boundaries on an aerial photograph or a topographic map. Secondly, WSS will overlay soil delineation lines within these property boundaries. Area calculations are made for the total property as well as for each soil group. At this point, you will be able to view the detailed soil descriptions concerning each of the soil groups.

The last descriptive piece of the WSS is for you to explore and evaluate the options in the Soil Data Explorer. You are provided access to soil data for your property, and WSS will list the suitability of the soils for a particular use. The options created are saved in a report format that can be checked out and printed to your local printer.

The Web Soil Survey is a tool. The information that is generated from your inputs will help you determine the potential and limitations of the area of interest. The results do not replace careful on-site observations, but can be used to better equip you with an understanding of your options in woodland management.



The Web Soil Survey tool can be accessed at <u>http://websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov/app/</u> <u>HomePage.htm</u>. This useful application includes all the valuable information in the printed Soil Surveys and much more to aid woodland owners in the management and care of their property.

## About the Author: -

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 The soil-tree relationship is important because it is a major factor in which trees will not only grow in a particular area but also have a chance to be successful.

 Photo courtesy: Matt Barton