

Natural Resources Conservation Service

Soil Science Division

Soil Survey Region 12



Grand Rapids, Michigan, Soil Survey Office

Assisting Michigan NRCS with Second-Level, Onsite Wetland Determinations

Purpose

Michigan NRCS receives hundreds of requests annually for wetland reconsiderations. Because this workload is too great for existing NRCS State staff, the MLRA Soil Survey Office (SSO) staffs in Grand Rapids and Flint have assisted for the past 6 years. In 2013, all soil scientists at these offices attended the training “Regulatory IV Wetland Identification and Delineation.” The training covered the three criteria for wetland determination: hydrology, hydrophytic vegetation, and hydric soil.

Key Outcomes

SSO staff members devote about 15 percent of their time (about 300 hours per year each) to wetland reconsiderations. These reconsiderations are submitted by landowners and operators to challenge a preliminary off-site determination. The wetland delineations on which SSO staff have worked ranged from 1 to over 300 acres. The evaluations took from a couple of hours to several days each. In 2018, the Grand Rapids staff completed 61 tracts. The soil scientists included Jon Quisler, Jonathan Diaz Cruz, and Matt Bromley. Greg Schmidt, ecological site specialist, also provided many hours of support by identifying plant species in both the field and office. A wide variety of wetland types were seen, including wet meadows, vernal pools, forested swamps, and shrub swamps.



Wetlands provide a variety of important functions, including flood protection, ground water recharge, nutrient and pollutant removal, and wildlife habitat for unique plant and animal communities.



Approximately half of Michigan's natural wetlands have been lost since pre-settlement days. Protection of the remaining wetlands is an ongoing effort. Accurate identification and delineation of these areas is a critical step in that process. For the foreseeable future, SSO staff will continue to provide this valuable technical soil service to the State.



Soil Scientist Jonathan Diaz Cruz (left) documenting the soil while performing a wetland determination. MLRA Soil Survey Office Leader Matt Bromley (right) recording the location of a wetland documentation point. Both scientists are members of the soil survey office staff at Grand Rapids.