MLRA Soil Survey Office, Rhinelander, Wisconsin

Students Learn About Soils and Career Opportunities with NRCS

Purpose

The Rhinelander MLRA Soil Survey Office provided students with hands-on soils experience and an awareness of careers within NRCS. Students from around the region came together for an annual career workshop at Trees for Tomorrow in northern Wisconsin. This week long workshop is focused on introducing students to environmental studies and careers in the natural resources industry. The soil survey staff demonstrated the basics of soil classification and discussed their careers as soil scientists.

This hands-on experience led many of the students to ask about the factors of soil formation, how soils affect land management, and future careers with NRCS. The staff emphasized the importance of soils in a broader context and explained how "everything humans do can be related to soils in one way or another."

Background Information

Trees for Tomorrow is a summer camp for high school students to learn about an array of fields within the natural resources industry. These fields include ornithology, biology, forestry, and many others. The soil survey staff is fortunate to attend this workshop on an annual basis and provide students with an introduction to soil science and NRCS. Every year the students are able to get their hands dirty and their boots wet working in soils with differences in textures (fig. 1), colors, drainage classes, parent materials, and vegetation. We also demonstrate some of the tools used by soil scientists, such as an amoozemeter, ArcGIS, and an auger/shovel.

Figure 1.—Scott Eversoll, MLRA project leader, demonstrating soil texturing and describing the soil's parent material.

The importance of wetlands and soils in the hydrologic cycle was discussed as we walked down slope to our second auger hole (fig. 2). The two-hole soil comparison is a great way to get students to understand the critical roles of landscape position, slope, and drainage

class on soil properties and formation. This soil exhibited an organic epipedon underlain by depleted subsurface horizons. The students were in awe when they learned that the clear waters they see in the northern lakes are a result of these humid, densely vegetated ecosystems.

Figure 2.—Scott Eversoll, MLRA project leader, and Ryan Bevernitz, soil scientist, discussing hydric soil properties and the importance of wetlands.

Key Outcomes

Trees for Tomorrow has for decades done a wonderful job at getting students outdoors and involved in natural resources. It is affiliated with the U.S. Forest Service. Several of our own employees attended this camp as students. Teaching the next generation about soils cannot get much better than this. The students are actively involved in the conversation and activities, as well as asking a plethora of great questions. The students leave the day with a greater knowledge of how natural systems operate and how important soils are in their everyday lives. We seek to encourage students to become more familiar with various environmental sciences and to answer questions that they may have about future career opportunities.