

HOW TO GET A SOIL MAP FROM THE WEB SOIL SURVEY

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Please notice that these directions are not at all complete. They only touch the surface of what you can do with the soil survey. These directions are intended only to help you get a basic soil map of your property.

The internet address is <http://websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov>

Click on the big green button that says “Start WSS”.

This takes you to the “Area of Interest” (AOI) tab.

Your area of interest must be less than 10,000 acres, unless you identify a whole county as the AOI.

On the left, you see the words “Search” and “Quick Navigation”.

Under “Quick Navigation”, it lists the ways you can start finding your property.

To Use Your Street Address

Some undeveloped properties have no street address. If this is your case, start with the address of a nearby property. This gets you close enough to proceed.

Click on “Address”, the first item on the list.

Enter your address in the dialog box.

Click on “View”, at the right either above or below where you put the address. The map box at the right turns grayish, which tells you that it is thinking and you have to wait.

You see an aerial map with an orange cross on it. The cross shows the location of the address you entered.

Above the aerial photo is a tool bar, and above that the title bar tells you that you're working in the "Area of Interest Interactive Map".

Under the title bar, on the right, next to the question mark, are two squares. You can click on "Full Width Map Layout" to see a larger map. You don't see the orange cross on the larger map. You can go back to the smaller map by clicking on the "Normal map layout" button.

Now you have to define the Area of Interest. This is to say, you need to draw a box around your property. You may not get it exact, but you can get close.

If you click on the question mark at the upper right of the map, it tells you what you can do with the buttons on the tool bar above the map. (There's an exit X in the upper right of that help screen that takes you back to the aerial photo.)

There are twelve buttons on the left side of the tool bar above the aerial photo. The seven on the left have to do with zooming in and out. There is no need to zoom in, and you have to sit and wait while it adjusts.

The two buttons on the right end of the group are used to define the Area of Interest.

The next to last button allows you to draw a rectangle, and the last button on the right allows you to draw an irregular polygon. You can use either method, or you can use the rectangle first and then the polygon, or vice versa. Use whichever does the best job of outlining your property.

The method for drawing a rectangle is slightly different from the method for drawing a polygon.

To Draw a Rectangular Area of Interest

Click on the "Define AOI by Rectangle" button.

Move into the map near your property.

Hold down the left mouse button and move the mouse. A red rectangle will begin to appear.

If your rectangle is in the wrong place, keep holding down the left mouse button while you press escape. The rectangle will disappear.

Let up on the mouse key and move the cursor to the new place where you want to start, then press down the left mouse button and begin anew.

Make the rectangle a little bigger than you think it needs to be. You can refine it later.

When you let up on the left mouse button, the map gets gray and it says "Creating AOI" as the software takes over and begins to define the area of interest as whatever is inside your rectangle.

When it is done, it has zoomed in more and there is an Area of Interest rectangle overlaid on the aerial photo.

Now you can draw a new rectangle that is closer to the actual property lines. The rectangles are all straight up and down and you may need to leave the box larger than your property in order to include all of the property.

You can keep redefining the AOI, but each time you do, you lose part of the original aerial photo. You can reach a point where you've made a mistake and you no longer have the whole property and you have to start over.

One way to start over is to Click "Clear AOI", which appears on the left half of the screen under "Area of Interest Properties". The original address information comes back up and you can click "View" to start over.

To Draw a Polygonal Area of Interest

You can draw a free-form many-sided polygon to define your area of interest. A polygon can probably get you closer to the actual boundaries of the property.

Start out the same way. Click on navigate by address and type in the street address of the property for which you want a soil map.

Click "View".

The Area of Interest Interactive Map comes up.

Click on the far right button on the toolbar; the one that says "Define AOI by Polygon" when you tap lightly on the left mouse key.

Click on the spot on the map where you want to start. Release the mouse key and a red line appears as you move the mouse. You can move the red line in any direction.

When you reach a point where you want a corner, click on the left mouse key.

When you've finished the polygon, double click on the left mouse key. You see the map turn gray as the software begins to generate the map for your area of interest.

You can further refine the polygon by clicking on the map and proceeding as above.

As with defining a rectangle, the esc key erases the polygon.

After Your Area of Interest Is Defined

There are four tabs across the white space above the aerial photo. They are labeled "Area of Interest (AOI)", "Soil Map", "Soil Data Explorer", and "Shopping Cart (Free)".

After you are satisfied with the Area of Interest, click on the “Soil Map” tab.

You go to a screen that shows your soil map on the right, overlaid on the aerial photo. The Area of Interest is outlined in teal. The soil types are abbreviated in orange. If there is more than one soil type, the soil types are delineated by an orange line.

On the left, under “Map Unit Legend”, it shows the “Map Unit Symbol” for the soil types, the “Map Unit Name” of the soil types and their descriptions, the acres and percentage of the different soil types within the Area of Interest, and the total acres in the AOI.

The focus will probably be fuzzy. You can zoom out a bit to improve the focus. The further out you zoom, the better the focus but the smaller your property.

If you click on the “Legend” tab that sticks out from the upper left of the soils map area, (the word “Legend” is written vertically), it shows you a list of the “layers” you can show on the map or remove from the map by clicking or unclicking the check boxes. You can play with them, but the original basic map is probably what you need.

The print of some of the choices is light, indicating you can't choose them. There's also a warning below the aerial photo that tells you the scale may be wrong for accurate display, and that you can't choose some things at this scale.

If you need, for example, a topo map (at the bottom of the Legend list), you may need to zoom out while you watch the words “topographical map”. When they turn dark, you've reached a scale where you can choose “topographical map” to see the topo map of your Area of Interest.

To Print Your Soil Map

Above the soil map, you'll see a box that says “Printable Version”. Click on it.

A dialog box comes up. You don't need to do much with it except click “View”, but you might want to type in a Custom Subtitle, which could include address and block and lot or whatever you want.

After you click “View” the screen tells you that it is “Generating Printable Version”. You may get a message that says “Cannot open external window. Do you have a popup blocker enabled?”

If you click OK, the message goes away, but you won't get the printable map.

To unblock pop-ups, go to the Windows toolbar that is above the words “Web Soil Survey” on the upper left. Click on “Tools” and on “Popup Blockers” on the dropdown list. Click on “Temporarily Allow Pop-ups”, which lets you get the map this one time; or “Turn off Pop-up Blocker” or another choice.

You get a printable pdf of the map. It also prints the information about types and percentages of soil types and puts your Custom Subtitle on each page.

To Save the Printable PDF of Your Soil Map

After the printable version has been generated, Click on “File” on the Windows menu line. Click on “Save As”. In the “Save a Copy” dialog box, type in the file name that you want to use. Click “Save”.

Help Screens

Near the top right of the screen, under the words “Web Soil Survey”, there is a Help tab. If you need assistance, left click on the Help tab.

You see a Help screen telling you the three basic steps.

At the end of the third step, there is a link called “Helpful Tips and Shortcuts”. It shows you more about navigating and may give you some ideas about the additional information you can get from the web soil survey.

To exit from Help and get back to the original help screen, click on the “X” exit button at the very top right of the computer screen.

You can get a FAQ that has helpful how-to information. The home page, (the very first screen with the big green “Start WSS” button) has a box on the right-hand side that is titled “I Want Help With...” Click on “Frequently Asked Questions.”

Reading About Your Soil Type

After you get your soil map, your soil type may have some peculiar-sounding things such as “Psammaquents, sulfidic substratum...”. If you want to know more about what that means, look on the left side of the screen, under “Map Unit Legend”. The second column, headed “Map Unit Name”, lists the soil types in blue. Click anywhere on the name of the soil type and you go to a window called “Map Unit Description.”

Logout When Finished

Your session times out in 40 minutes. The website sponsor asks that you logout when you are finished, rather than letting your time expire. Logging out frees up the space for other users.

The logout tab is in the upper right, under the title “Web Soil Survey”, next to “Help”. Click on the logout tab. Your session ends and you see a thank you message.