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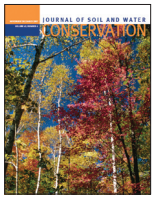
A look at how Canada's Prince Edward Island is responding to fish kills.

Opportunities exist for improving soil productivity using elements of both organic and no-till systems.

On the Cover
Fall color of paper birch and red maple in northern Wisconsin. Photo by Steven Katovich, USDA Forest Service.



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Readers' forum

NEW MINDSET NEEDED FOR MANAGING OUR SOIL

I recently read *Managing Agricultural Landscapes for Environmental Quality* and greatly appreciated the insightful articles. But I must say that I read very little about leading a change in managing our soil.

We seem to continue the old mindset of focusing on the loss of the soil particle. We need a new direction that focuses on maintaining the pore space and thus soil health. It is disappointing that the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and soil conservation districts have all kinds of practices/standards such as conservation crop rotaion, cover crops, and residue and tillage management yet we fail to have a standard or at the least a guideline for soil management. We spend money and time on erosion and poor drainage, etc., but we cannot cost share on soil management, the practice that would sustain the physical, chemical, and biological funcitons.

We don't have to be rocket scientists to know we have a problem and don't need costly equipment to measure compaction—ask any farmer who drives fence posts or tills hard/dense worn-out soil. Try driving a metal rod in the soil. If you have difficulty, how do you think the roots feel that are trying to penetrate the hard soil?

So my question is, when will we adopt a new mindset and use our tax dollars for the farm bill more effectively?

David Friedman
Director of the Ocean County Soil Conservation District, New Jersey

ANOTHER CHAPTER IN LIFE-LONG LEARNING

Thank you for your review of the book *Dirt: The Erosion of Civilizations*. I read the book and found it quite interesting, educational, eye opening, and just a bit alarming. David R. Montgomery sure packed a lot in it. There's much I wish I had known when I started with the USDA Soil Conservation Service back in 1966. I'm retired now, but although I'm no longer a "fed," I'm still a conservationist and I'm involved in conservation in other ways now. I'm convinced of the importance of life-long learning.

Many years ago I was introduced to the book *Topsoil and Civilization* by Vernon Gill Carter and Tom Dale published in 1955 and updated in 1974. After reading that book, it became early "assigned reading" for all new trainees that came to my office. Now, if I had trainees the assigned reading would be *Dirt*. Both are good, but considering that "soil science" really didn't become a science until about 100 years ago, *Dirt* has about twice as many years of research knowledge to call upon.

Of course, we have to thank Walter C. Lowdermilk for his work in the early part of the 20th century for beginning to pull back the shroud and give us a peek at the relationships of civilizations and natural resources over 7,000 years.

Daniel F. Kesselring
Past president,
SWCS Michigan Chapter
Marshall, Michigan

ANSWERS SOUGHT FOR FLOODPLAIN MANAGEMENT

Your recent journal issue was exceptional in terms of the information it provided of surface water management.

Our situation with our tributary streams in southeastern Minnesota and the management of their floodplains has been a concern, particularly with the impact of the very severe storms that now seem to occur more frequently. These floodplains in many areas are now no longer pastured and have been taken over by dense invasive wooded vegetation. A question that could be addressed by the *Journal of Soil and Water Conservation* is, what is the impact on the flow characteristics of these streams, especially as it relates to downstream flooding?

A study on the Coon Creek area of Wisconsin reported by Stan Trimble in *Science* indicated a widening of the stream channels in the wooded parts of the floodplain. He was looking more at the effects of sedimentation and wasn't able to address the effects of flooding or flowage from storm events.

My question is, are we seeing an accelerated rate of flowage in these areas because more of these flood waters are now directed to the channel of the floodplain and maybe are somewhat stalled in these dense wooded areas? Is this also causing a "venturi effect" where the velocities within the channels are significantly increased and could be more damaging in the way of downstream flooding?

Trimble indicates that there are no or limited federal programs to address this situation because many of these areas are noncropped and are not eligible for any type of program consideration. If these unmanaged floodplains are contributing to a flooding problem, maybe it is time to rethink some of our policies.

George Poch
Rochester, Minnesota

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