



## Soil Science Society of America

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www.soils.org • email: headquarters@soils.org

April 13<sup>th</sup>, 2011

Dear Soil Science Society members and Certified Professionals,

As many of you have likely read or heard by now, the Soils Science Certification Board and the Soil Science Society is in the process of bringing the Certified Professional Soil Scientist (CPSS) and Certified Professional Soil Classifier (CPSC) certifications into the single designation of Certified Professional Soil Scientist. The certification board is made up of professionals in private practice, government agencies and universities and is unified and unanimous in the need for this change. We believe that a singular certification will aid in bettering our science and our industry as a whole.

For years the soil science profession has been misunderstood by the public and many other professional industries. The confusion as to what a soil scientist is, and what we are qualified to do, is likely in part due to complexity of our science which includes the sciences of chemistry, physics, geology, biology, ecology, hydrology and climatology. The two certifications within our system gives the impression soil science consists of two distinct areas, classification and non-classification; this has greatly contributed to and magnified the level of confusion both inside and outside of our industry. It has become increasingly obvious over the last few years that this division within the certification program was the root to much of the confusion about the soils science profession.

We have received a few letters from concerned certified individuals that are opposed to discontinuing the CPSC. In these letters the individuals have stated their interpretation of what a CPSC is opposed to a CPSS. Each of the concerned certified individuals described what a CPSC is very differently. The Board and the society greatly appreciate this input as it has made the issue very clear; it is not only outsiders to our field but also our own certified individuals that are confused by having two certifications. When other industries or the public at large are confused by the system we could rationalize the issue as one of poor outreach or lack of communication from our industry to others, but when certified individuals within the soil science certification system can't understand the differences, how can we expect others to understand when a situation is appropriate to call on the services of a Soil Scientist opposed to a professional in a different discipline?

Some have argued that to be a CPSC one must have five years of in-field soil mapping experience. The experience requirement for the soil classifier does not specify that the experience must be in-field mapping or direct field applications, nor does it exclude the areas of laboratory, research or teaching as some individuals had thought. What the current CPSC does guarantee is that the individual has 5 semester hours of a soil classification class, which many to most CPSS's have, and 5 years of professional experience doing something that is related to classification. If you teach, conduct research or laboratory work that has to do with soil formation, morphology, etc. it too would be counted as classification experience toward a CPSC. A soil scientist working in an office with GIS to identify locations that are mapped as having hydric soils for construction limitations for the private sector may never be in the field, but that does not mean that experience would not count toward a CPSC.

If the CPSC were only for people that conduct in-field soil series mapping, as some have stated as their interpretation, then this brings the topic to an even more interesting question. What qualifies as field classification of soils? If a scientist's only experience in the field is to site septic leaching fields, does that qualify that person to conduct an order one or order two soil survey? So is that person a Soil Classifier or not?



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What about the individual that is in the field evaluating soil profiles for salts, free carbonates, structure and textural changes with depth and hydraulic conductivity to determine whether the site is feasible for a restoration project? This person is not “classifying” the soil to the series level, nor are they creating a USDA-NRCS style soil map of the soils, but they are experienced in applied soil morphology, genesis and formation and how to interpret those characteristics. Some of you may say, yes, that person should definitely qualify as a CPSC, others may disagree. The interesting thing about this example is the individual whom this example is about more than meets the education requirements to become a CPSC, yet does not consider himself a soil classifier. Examples like this can go on and on.

The fact is a soil scientist, no matter what area of specialty they may practice, must have an understanding of many of the “specialty” areas of the entire science in order to practice good soil science. Hopefully this makes it more clear that not only is it likely impossible to correctly define an individual as being specialized in a singular specialty area of soils science, it is also not accurate to attempt such a specific designation due to the nature of the science.

One might ask, then how do we prevent a CPSS that is not qualified to conduct soil mapping from mapping soils, or how do we prevent any soil scientist that is not qualified to practice in a specific specialty area from practicing in that area? The answer is simple. The same way we always have, through the Code of Ethics. If you haven’t re-read our Code of Ethics in a while I suggest you do, it is a great quick refresher on what is expected of all of us as certified professionals. You will notice in Article 2, number 2 it states; *“A Registrant shall not give professional opinion or make a recommendation without being as thoroughly informed as might reasonably be expected considering the purpose for which the opinion or recommendation is desired, and the degree of completeness of information upon which the opinion is based should be made clear.”* In other words, you cannot practice outside of your area of expertise. Also note that article 5 states it is all certified professional’s duty to report unethical activities of other certified professionals. Each of us abiding to the rules set forth within the Code of Ethics has been, and remains to be, the best means for all soil scientists to ensure for ourselves and those we serve a highly respected and trusted scientific profession made up of highly respected individuals.

Change is never easy and there will never be 100% agreement within any group to a change. What I and the Soil Science Certification Board hope is that all soil science practitioners, no matter what part of the industry you practice or in what area you specialize, can understand that the purpose of this change is to better position the entire soil science industry to retain and capture the jobs that are best suited for soil scientists. More and better soils science jobs will attract the interest of high quality students to the soils industry. New soil scientists coming into the professional ensures the future of the science to which we have dedicated our careers and reputations.

The certification board and I appreciate your input and hope you now have a better understanding of the time and thought that has gone into this decision as well as the purpose and need for the change.

Sincerely,  
Matt

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Matt M. Duncan".

Matthew M. Duncan, CPSS/CPAg/PSS-MN  
Chair of the Soil Science Certification Board