USDA United States Department of Agriculture

# Alaska's Soil Survey

**Natural Resources Conservation Service**


## Soil

We use soil to grow our food, make bricks and concrete. We build our homes and schools on top of soil. We pull our drinking water out of soil. We bury our deceased loved ones in soil.

Not all soil is the same. Soils have markedly different land use capabilities that are not obvious to most observers. Knowing qualities of soil allows for the best land use planning.

## Soil Surveys

A soil survey helps communities plan. It provides the starting point to make informed choices. Maps in the survey show potential uses and limitations of the soil. For example, the maps show what land can uphold trail use, is stable for homes, or where to put a landfill. Villages can rely on a soil survey when planning airstrips or sewage lagoons, and selecting a cemetery site.

A soil survey identifies the depth to water tables, potential gravel and sand sources, as well as topsoil and roadfill sources. The vegetation and hydrology associated with each soil type is also described.

## Doing a Soil Survey

Field soil scientists conduct a survey by observing differences in soil types, properties and landforms. The scientists use hand tools to dig holes and record the properties of the different soils.

The holes are usually about six feet deep and two feet wide. Whenever they can, soil scientists make use of cutbanks, gravel pits, and other exposures to see the soil from the side. When done with the hole, the scientists will backfill and replace the vegetation. It is usually difficult to tell where the holes were dug.

## Requesting a Soil Survey

The USDA - Natural Resources Conservation Service completes soil surveys for communities and villages for free through agreements.

Contact the NRCS State Soil Scientist for more information. Consider the level of detail needed for the survey; what you hope to learn from the survey and how you plan to use it.

**For more information contact:**

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Information is also available at:
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