



ILLINOIS SOIL CLASSIFIERS ASSOCIATION

Inside this issue:

Message from the President

2026 Executive Council

Nomination of Robert L McLeese for Honorary Membership

Annual Meeting Award Winners

2026 Annual Meeting Highlights

Community College Outreach

World Soil Museum

Save the Date: Field Indicators for Hydric Soils - Part 2

Newsletter Committee

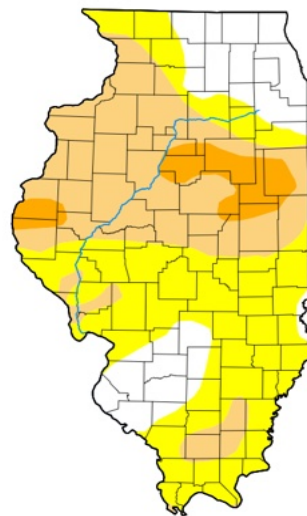
Send Newsletter submissions to:

newsletter@illinoissoils.org

Ashtyn Stufflebeam
Mindy Siner
Mark Bramstedt

Message from the President

Happy spring, everyone! After a long winter, it's great to see the grass turning green, trees budding, and daffodils blooming. Although we've enjoyed some warm and pleasant days lately (70 degrees and sunny during the annual meeting!), spring rains are also welcome as many parts of Illinois continue to experience abnormally dry or drought conditions. I recently started following the U.S. Drought Monitor through the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's National Drought Mitigation Center as we move into the growing season. You may find it interesting as well.



Map released: Thurs. April 2, 2026

Data valid: March 31, 2026 at 8 a.m. EDT

Intensity

- None
- D0 (Abnormally Dry)
- D1 (Moderate Drought)
- D2 (Severe Drought)
- D3 (Extreme Drought)
- D4 (Exceptional Drought)
- No Data

Authors

United States and Puerto Rico Author(s):

David Simerali, Western Regional Climate Center

Pacific Islands and Virgin Islands Author(s):

Illinois Drought Monitor <https://droughtmonitor.unl.edu/CurrentMap.aspx>

As soil scientists, we understand the relationship between soils, water (precipitation, surface and groundwater), plants, animals, and even humans. Major events like droughts and dust storms bring these relationships into public view, but it is something that soil scientists think about daily. Soil science encompasses everything from mapping soil series throughout the state and supporting farmers in managing soil health and installing cover crops, to delineating wetlands to protect them from the impacts of development, ensuring septic systems and infiltration BMPs are properly sited to prevent pollution, and so much more. The scope of soil science is as broad as the land. (continued next page)

Message from the President (continued)

Looking forward, my priorities as President during the upcoming year include:

- Strengthening professional and technical education through our Hydric Soils Courses
- Supporting and encouraging students in pursuing soil science through involvement and membership in the ISCA, sponsorships of soil judging teams, and scholarship opportunities
- Working with the committees to promote our organization and broaden its reach

Sharing our knowledge is vital to the future of our field, and these efforts help ensure we continue advancing both our professional reach and public understanding of the importance of soils.

To that end, I encourage all members to become involved in one of our committees. Committee participation is a great way to connect with others in the organization, contribute your expertise, and help guide the future of the Association. ISCA Council members, Committees, and Chairs for the upcoming year are listed in this newsletter. Please consider reaching out to a Committee Chair to volunteer to participate with a committee this year.

Mary Beth



Mary Beth accepting the gavel from Alicia

2026 Executive Council & Cabinet

Executive Council Officers

President- Mary Beth Falsey
 Vice President- Eric Brevik
 Secretary- Liz Miernicki
 Treasurer- Robert Tegeler
 President Elect- Scott Wiesbrook
 Past President- Alicia Metzger



Committee Chairs

Constitution, By-Laws & Legislative - Dalton Williamson
 Ethics, Certification & Membership- Josh Litwiller
 Finance- Eric Brevik
 Newsletter- Mark Bramstedt
 Nominations- Alicia Metzger
 Public Relations & Education- Brandon Mueller

Special Appointments

Technical Advisory Committee- Brad Cate
 IDPH Advisory Commission- Don Fehrenbacher
 Webmaster- Mark Bramstedt
 Historian- Bill Kreznor

Certification Board

Dalton Williamson '29
 Don Fehrenbacher '29
 Galen Litwiller, '27
 Josh Litwiller, '27
 Ken Anderson, Chair, '28
 Doug Gaines, Secretary, '28

Nomination of Robert L. McLeese, Honorary Member

Bob grew up near Towanda, Illinois where, as a youth, he enjoyed working at his grandfather's farm about a mile down the road from his house. He cultivated a love of maps and went on to earn a B.S. in Geography at Northern Illinois University in 1973. He combined his love of maps with a growing interest in soil science after enrolling in several soils courses there. He continued his education at Michigan State University where he earned an M.S. in Soil Science in 1975.

Bob's career as a Soil Classifier landed him in a number of locations before coming back to Illinois. He began mapping soils as a graduate research assistant while at MSU with the Agricultural Experiment Station. He was a County Soil Scientist mapping soils in Bay County, Michigan (published in 1980). He began federal service as a Soil Scientist with the Bureau of Indian Affairs on the Rosebud Indian Reservation in south-central South Dakota where he worked on developing irrigation projects. He transferred to the Soil Conservation Service back to Michigan and served as the Soil Survey Leader for the soil surveys of both Jackson County, Michigan (published in 1981) and Isabella County, Michigan (published in 1985). Bob was promoted to Assistant State Soil Scientist in Vermont and worked there in the early and mid-1980s. He was promoted to State Soil Scientist for Illinois in 1988. He served in that position until late 2010. He was instrumental in updating digital soils data that set standards for other states to follow. Post-retirement from federal service, Bob continues working part-time as a consultant and serving as an eloquent advocate of the wise use and management of the soil resource.

Bob joined the Illinois Soil Classifiers Association in 1988 and earned ISCA Certification in 1989. He served as Certification Board Chair from 1993 to 1994, and chair of the Constitution and By-Laws Committee in 2016. He has earned the Bent Auger award. It was his leadership, dogged determination, and keen insight as Chair of the State Soil Committee from 1989 until 2002 that brought about the designation of Drummer silty clay loam as Illinois State Soil in 2001. His passion and persistence working to achieve this goal spanned over a decade. And his insightful, bottom-up, grass roots approach recruiting youth of FFA and 4-H as

well as local ag teachers to engage legislators ultimately proved successful.

Bob's daughter Bridget writes: "I was lucky enough to be in high school at Monticello when we worked with Chicago Ag Science to lobby in Springfield and help Drummer Silty Clay Loam become Illinois' State Soil. I knew at the time it was a pretty special thing to be part of, but as most things like this go, as I have gotten older I appreciate more and more what a unique experience it truly was and how grateful I am to my dad for making it happen".

Bob's son Zach observes: "Dad has moved well beyond sharing his love of soils with just his own kids. He now has seven grandchildren, and I'm fairly certain there isn't another group of seven kids anywhere in Illinois – and probably not the country – who know the answer to the question, 'What's the state soil?'"

One of Bob's co-workers, Paige Buck, wrote this upon his retirement: "Does Bob sound like a busy guy? Don't forget to factor in that he and wife Rosie raised 3 children who were scholars and athletes. Bob served as a basketball referee, speaks to FFA Chapters, Soil and Water Conservation Society events, recruiting efforts, University of Illinois functions and he never misses an opportunity to make a point or positively impact those around him. Basically, if you ask Bob to do something and it offers a chance to promote soil, he'll do it. He'll find the time, make the commitment, and do a bang-up job. Bob has never disappointed the crowd. ... The bottom line is this: no matter who you are or what you do for a living, if you spend five minutes with Bob McLeese, you will know more about soil and you will appreciate its importance. Bob McLeese has been a passionate scientist who worked every day to make his slice of the Earth a better place to live."

Many of us have had the pleasure of being in the audience during one of Bob's presentations: University of Illinois Extension programs, collegiate soil judging, YouTube video, Farm Progress Show, and radio and television spots. His eloquent advocacy for the wise use of the soil resource is unmatched. One might say Bob is emulating the Apostle Paul, traveling and spreading a gospel of wise soil management.

Nomination of Robert L. McLeese, Honorary Member (continued)

Bob's interests in the natural world (and, some would say, his quirkiness) go beyond soil science. Some of you may not know that Bob is also scat lapidary: he designs and creates jewelry and other items (tie tacks, earrings, lapel pins, doorstops) from the excrement of various animals. Bob's wife Rosie states that Bob has a wide network of family, friends, and colleagues that send him "raw materials" that form the basis of his designs. This side hustle is known as ScatTacs. He has sold and gifted his creations to many in his network.

Bob will say his legacy is that he was blessed to have worked with many great people and was able to continue and refine the work of his predecessors. His daughter Bridget recalls this from her father: "When I'm sixty-five years old and sitting on the porch, what do I want to be able to say about my career? That good people had been there helping me. People who grew old working beside me. No amount of money can make you feel that way – not when you're sixty-five and sitting on the porch."

We hope that Bob can see his way clear to keep that porch chair empty a bit longer and continue his service as a remarkable Ambassador of Soil Science.

Without hesitation, I ask you to consider and approve Bob McLeese as an Honorary Full Member of the Illinois Soil Classifiers Association.

Respectfully submitted, William R. Kreznor,

Unanimously approved 21 March 2026



Award Winners

Alicia presents the Burton W Ray
Scholarship Award to Isaac
Luebkeemann



Alicia presents Brandon
Mueller with the
Bent Auger Award



Brandon presents the ISCA
Student Member Scholarship
Award to Jenna Beckmeyer



2026 ISCA Annual Meeting Highlights

The 2026 ISCA Annual Meeting was attended by 30 members and guests at the Illinois Natural History Building in Champaign.

- After a catered lunch and a time of fellowship, the meeting was called to order by President Alicia Metzger.
- Dr. Alfred Hartemink, Professor of Soil Science at UW-Madison presented an excellent discourse on new ways to determine and describe soil horizons.
- Robert McLeese was nominated as an Honorary Member for his dedication to promoting soil science throughout his personal and professional life.
- Brandon Mueller was selected as the 2026 recipient of the Bent Auger Award.
- Other highlights of the meeting were the awarding of the Burton W. Ray Scholarship to Isaac Luebkekmann, and the ISCA Student Member Scholarship to Jenna Beckmeyer. Congratulations to our student members!
- Door prizes! - Dr. H donated several of his works! Thank you Dr. H!
- Mary Beth Falsey closed the meeting with the announcement of her new committee chairs.



Community College Outreach

by Bill Kreznor, CPSC

Two and one-half years ago, I wrote an item that was published in the Fall 2023 Newsletter describing some educational outreach activities William R. Kreznor & Associates, Inc. was involved with. Those activities included participation in the Green Living Expo hosted by the Sustainability Center at McHenry County College (MCC) in Crystal Lake and serving as guest lecturers for introductory soils classes at the MCC Center for Agrarian Learning. The Center offers programs in horticulture and entrepreneurial agriculture that include classes in crop and soil science, greenhouse management, and agricultural marketing. I am pleased to report that our activities have expanded to include educational outreach activities with the Horticulture Department at the College of DuPage (COD) in Wheaton, Illinois.

In the fall of 2024 and 2025, Brandon Mueller, CPSC and I were asked to give guest lectures to the Introductory Soils class there. We made our presentation to two of the three sections of the class, a total of about twenty-eight students. During the 2024 presentation, we mentioned that we had constructed a soil monolith for use by the MCC soils and agriculture classes. Shortly after the presentation at the COD, Brian Clement, instructor and Chair of the Horticulture Department, called me to ask if Brandon and I could construct a number of monoliths for his department. He added that there were funds in the budget to pay us for the work. The COD would construct the trays to my specifications and supply all the materials: glue, cheesecloth, etc. Brandon and I would be responsible for collecting the soils and mounting them. Brian asked that we provide twelve monoliths.

We constructed the monoliths from 3-inch soil cores. Two such cores could be opened and parts of each placed in the trays, displaying the morphological features very nicely (Figure 1). A soil profile description and GPS sample location plotted on a soil map were included with each monolith.



Figure 1. Four of the twelve soil monoliths now in use by the Horticulture Department at the College of DuPage

We were hoping to collect a variety of soils. Kreznor & Associates services much of northeastern and north-central Illinois, so we were able to get a good representation of soil orders, parent materials, and drainage classes. A Varna profile was collected from a restored prairie on the COD campus with the help of some of the department staff. I thought it would be instructive to flesh out the catena concept by collecting Ashkum and Elliott profiles. An Ozaukee soil (Alfisol) was added to the mix to demonstrate differences with the Varna (Mollisol) as both formed on similar landscapes in similar parent materials. Other monoliths included Martinsville, Starks, and Dodge soils: Alfisols formed in outwash, loess over outwash, and loess over till respectively, each exhibiting well developed E horizons. A sandy Entisol (Oakville) was collected from a dune on the Kankakee Torrent outwash plain. Two soils having interesting features were also collected: a Harpster soil, likely from a former small, shallow glacial lakebed exhibiting calcic horizons replete with fragments of snail shells, and an Ogle soil containing an Illinoian-age red paleosol. Griswold and Osco soils completed the collection.

The COD horticulture program is growing. In 2025, we addressed three sections, each with ten to twelve students. In addition, one of our presentations was video recorded for viewing by a fourth section in the online program. We were able to illustrate much of our discussion using a number of those twelve monoliths. Brandon returned to the 2025 MCC Green Living Expo on November 1. There was great interest and positive feedback from those attendees who visited Brandon's table and viewed his exhibits. And we have been asked to return to the COD for the Fall 2026 cohort of Horticulture students there.

World Soil Museum

by Mark Bramstedt

In conversation with Dr. Hartemink, our guest speaker at the Annual Meeting, he mentioned that he had once been the Head of the World Soil Museum in the Netherlands. This comment reminded me that Illinois has a soil profile of Cisne silt loam at the World Soil Museum - <https://wsm.isric.org/visit.html> This profile, originally described by Dr. Joe B. Fehrenbacher in 1950, was gathered and sent to the Museum by the University of Illinois and the staff of the Jasper County Soil Survey in the May of 1985 (all ISCA members at the time). Following is an excerpt of the original article in the August 1985 Newsletter.

This past spring Illinois made a unique contribution to the international knowledge of soil science. A special monolith of Cisne silt loam was collected for permanent display at the International Soil Reference Information Center or ISRIC (formerly the International Soil Museum) at Wageningen, Netherlands. A cooperative effort involving the Soil Conservation Service, the University of Illinois, and Jasper County led to the successful collection of the sample. On May 21 the sampling team assembled at the type location of the Cisne series--fine, montmorillonitic, mesic Mollic Albaqualfs. The type location is at the University of Illinois Agricultural Experiment Station field just outside of Newton in Jasper County. The sampling team consisted of Dave Cremeens, graduate student and Soil Lab Supervisor, and Bob Darmody, Assistant Professor of Agronomy, both with the University of Illinois. Rounding out the sampling team were Mark Bramstedt, Bryan Fitch, Bill Kreznor, and Roger Risley representing the Jasper County Soil Survey.

A large pit had been excavated with a backhoe in order to allow several of the team to work at the same time. A column of soil approximately 12 inches wide, 4 inches deep, and 60 inches in height was sculpted from the pit face. A plywood box of near identical inside dimension was then placed over the soil column and braced against the pit walls. The boxed soil column was then pushed away from the pit face to a horizontal position in the pit. The soil column was further sculpted to remove excess soil material in order that the box could be sealed for shipment to Europe. The boxed sample was then carried "coffin-style" out of the pit. The staff of the ISRIC will prepare the display monolith from the boxed soil column..

The Cisne monolith will join about 30 other monoliths from the United States representing a variety of soil taxa. (Submitted by Bill Kreznor)



Cisne silt loam - Fine, smectitic, mesic Mollic Albaqualfs (Soil Taxonomy)
 WRB 1988 - Albi-Gleyic- Luvisol (Cutanic Dystric)
 FAO 88 - Albi Gleyic Alisol
 FAO 74 - Gleyic Acrisol

Registration open soon. All information is tentative at this time. Watch the Announcements Page <https://illinoissoils.org/announce/> for updates.

Save the Date

Illinois Soil Classifiers Association's Field Indicators of Hydric Soils Part 2

August 6 – 7, 2026

Lake County SMC and Lake County Forest Preserves are happy to host the Illinois Soil Classifiers Association's Field Indicators of Hydric Soils Part 2, a two-day training course teaching Field Indicators of Hydric Soils referenced in the the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Wetland Delineation Manual for the Midwest and Northcentral-Northeast Regions. Day 1 will include a morning in the classroom where ISCA Soil Scientists will provide a brief overview of soil formation, landscapes, water flow, local geology and glacial activity, and field indicators of hydric soils followed by an afternoon in the field describing and identifying field indicators of hydric soils. Day 2 includes sites within Lake County Forest Preserves where you will have a chance to describe field indicators of hydric soils in sandy soils. All levels of background and experience are welcome. Please come prepared with field equipment and dressed for field work, rain or shine.

Cost: \$500

Location: Lake County Stormwater Management Commission Headquarters and
Field Location TBD (Day 1)

Lake County Forest Preserve Field Locations TBD (Day 2)

Earn: 12 PDHs

Register: illinoissoils.org

Limited to 50 Registrants. Reserve your spot today!

Sponsored by:



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This is YOUR Newsletter. If you wish to submit material, here are some guidelines:

- Email a digital copy.
- Use minimal formatting.
- Subject matter is open and includes:
 - general topics on soil science, soil research & investigations, field activities
 - soil judging
 - personal encounters with soil, geomorphology, earth sciences
 - other topics that would be of general interest to members
 - photos are appreciated
 - no political editorials
 - The committee reserves the right to publish or not and edit for grammar & length without affecting the integrity of the article

Send Newsletter submissions to:

newsletter@illinoissoils.org

Newsletter Committee

Ashtyn Stufflebeam
Mindy Siner
Mark Bramstedt

Soil Science “concerns the development under the influence of environmental conditions of the outer layer of the earth’s crust. It concerns the part of the earth’s crust which is itself both the product and indispensable support of organic life on the earth. The soil lies on the twilight of life, a connecting link between the living and the non-living, between material animated by vital forces and material subject to physical forces.”

Charles F Marbut 1949

The Illinois Soil Classifiers Association is an organization promoting the wise use of the soil resource. ISCA is made up of professional soil classifiers in public service, private industry, and education and includes students and others interested in preserving soil. A soil classifier maps, describes and interprets soils according to a national system of soil classification. ISCA was established in 1975 and is affiliated with the American Registry of Certified Professionals in Agronomy, Crops, and Soils.

ISCA on Facebook and X

For those of you who want to keep in touch with ISCA members & others interested in soils in Illinois, join our group on Facebook or X. Search Facebook for “Illinois Soil Classifiers Association” or “@ISCA_Soil” on X. Contact webmaster@illinoissoils.org to get permission if you want to post on these platforms.

ISCA at www.illinoissoils.org

Check out the “Announcements” page on our website for current activities, especially between Newsletters. It is an excellent resource to keep you informed on certification, membership, and the latest soil issues.

Newsletter Publication Schedule

- Winter (February)
- Spring (April/May)
- Summer (Aug/Sept)
- Fall (November)

