



ILLINOIS SOIL CLASSIFIERS ASSOCIATION

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Message from the President

I can't believe it's fall already!

This year has been full of ISCA activities, including the Annual Meeting in Champaign, the Hydric Soil class in Lake County, and the Joint Fall Meeting/Tour in collaboration with the Indiana Association of Professional Soil Classifiers along the Illinois/Indiana border. The ISCA is comprised of a great group of knowledgeable professionals, but we also know how to have a good time! It's always fun to catch up with you all at our events. We hope even more of you can make it in 2027!

It was great to see everyone at the fall meeting and make new connections with our Indiana counterparts. There's more on the tour in an article below, but I'd like to thank ISCA members Mark Bramstedt and Mike Konen for organizing the tour and making it a success.

I'm always happy to see new faces at ISCA events, and this year was no exception. Although it reminds me that I'm no longer one of the young folks! Sharing our knowledge and encouraging the next generations to pursue soil science education and careers is essential in continuing the ISCA's goal of promoting the wise use of one of our most valuable natural resources - SOIL!

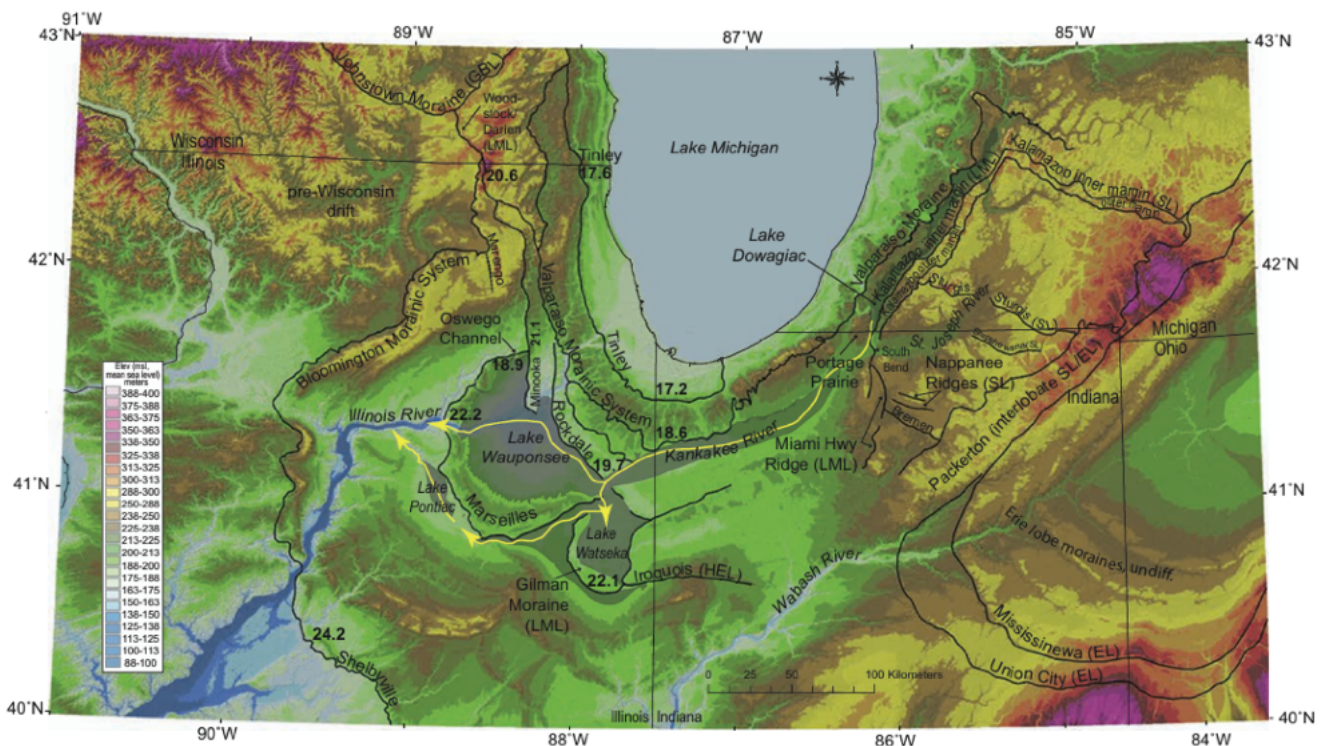
To that end, I'll provide a book recommendation for your kids, grandkids, or any other youngsters in your life. I recently came across a book called *EROSION: How Hugh Bennett Saved America's Soil and Ended the Dust Bowl*, by Darcy Pattison and Illustrated by Peter Willis. It's an excellent book that explains the dust bowl and the formation of the NRCS in language that youth can understand. Christmas will be here before you know it, and what kid doesn't want to learn about Hugh Bennett??

I wish everyone a peaceful winter and delightful holiday season. I look forward to seeing what the ISCA brings in 2027!

Mary Beth

The Kankakee Torrent and the Kankakee Sands were the focus of the 2026 Fall Meeting. This was a joint meeting with Illinois and Indiana soil classifiers along the state line southeast of Kankakee. The day began in Morocco, IN with introductions before heading to the Iroquois County State Wildlife Area to jump into some sandy soil pits. Our own Dr. Michael Konen gave a detailed discussion of the soils and geomorphology of the area. We were also blessed with an impromptu discussion of the ecology of the area led by Fran Harty, retired (somewhat) INHS biologist. Soils highlighted were Oakville, Morocco/Watseka, and the elusive Granby/Gilford.

All-in-all, the day was a success- good camaraderie and interaction between members of both associations, enthusiastic participation in the soil pits, wonderful presenters sharing their knowledge, and perfect weather! Thanks to all (both Indiana and Illinois) who took part in organizing and attending this event. There's rumor that we may do something similar in the south in 2027! Stay tuned!



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Photos from the Fall Meeting



Connecting with a Colleague

A short distance down the road from me lived a couple from Mendota, IL. Both Mary and Mark were educators - teachers and administrators with our local school district. Both retired about the same time some years ago but remained active in the community. Mark's hobbies included restoring old cars. He was a curious sort and had asked me several times over the years about spending part of the day on the job with me conducting soil investigations. He was fascinated with the workings of my Mobile Drill rig mounted on the bed of a diesel F-350 dually. I finally relented and invited him to join me sampling on a couple of sites near my base in Woodstock. He was genuinely interested, asking thoughtful questions about the soil and the sampling rig. I could see he was itching to run the rig, so I let him pull a couple of cores and assist me with their descriptions. It was a hugely enjoyable experience I am certain many of you have shared in the course of your own work - sharing your knowledge and experience with individuals and groups who are genuinely curious and interested in what you do and how you do it.

Mark died unexpectedly from an undiagnosed health issue two weeks later.

Mark's memorial service was attended by nearly two hundred souls, celebrating a life well lived by tragically cut way too short. And I discovered what might have sparked, in part, his interest in my work. Mark's brother-in-law, Mary's brother, is Carl Wacker. Some of you will remember Carl from his years working as a Soil Scientist on Project Soil Surveys in Illinois in the 1970s and 1980s. Some of you may have even worked with him.

Carl is one of a number of Illinois Soil Scientists from that era and afterwards who went on to become State Soil Scientists: Tyrone Goddard, Don Fehrenbacher, Mike Lilly, Kristine Ryan, Jennifer (Wollenweber) Smith, and maybe some I have forgotten (my apologies). That is a remarkable tribute to the Illinois Soil Survey program and its brothers and sisters in arms: administrators, supervisors, and colleagues.

Carl and I crossed paths years ago shortly after he became Wisconsin State Soil Scientist. The Wisconsin Society of Professional Soil Scientists were having a meeting/field tour while I was vacationing in northwest Wisconsin. The meeting was nearby so I crashed their party. (I reported the event in an ISCA Newsletter at the time).

So, it was wonderful to re-connect with Carl recently when he visited his sister Mary. We sat down on Mary's deck, enjoyed snacks and drinks, and reminisced on days gone by. Carl's been retired for some time but keeps active training horses as a post-retirement "hobby/career" in the Madison, Wisconsin area. I was not surprised that Carl singled out several mentors and colleagues he believed had a hand in his successes and was interested in where they were and what they were doing. He would be pleased to hear from anyone who would like to contact him. Drop me a line at wkreznor@wrksoiltesting.com and I will share his contact information with you.

Submitted by William R. Kreznor



Photo: Bill and Carl enjoying a cold one, & swapping stories

*Ron Collman in the News**submitted by Liz Miernicki*Organic acres offer soil health lessons in WillCounty-By HANNAH SPANGLER FarmWeek Aug 10, 2026

Red clover blankets the field where organic wheat once grew, following the first organic crop harvest at Jackson Creek Preserve in early July.

The preserve, part of the Will County Forest Preserve District, includes 3,165 acres of no-till row crop farmland, 387 of which are managed organically. Judith Wallace, the district's land management coordinator, said farming helps keep the land productive and well maintained until resources are available to restore it to its native prairie, wetland or woodland habitats.

Doug Yunker, who grows organic crops on his farm in Frankfort, was a featured speaker during the Will County Farm Bureau Nutrient Stewardship Field Day, where he discussed the 147 organic acres he leases from the preserve.

"It's a big learning process of how do we manage weeds and how do we get the correct nutrients that we need for our crops," he told FarmWeek during the July 30 event.

Transitioning to organic also takes time, Yunker said. Although he started farming on the preserve's land in 2022, it takes at least three years "from the last prohibited substance" for the land to become certified organic.

During that period, he still had to farm the land as organic, but had to market it as conventional.

Yunker said there was a little bit of a price decline and hit on his returns in that time, but he thinks he will make the money back.

"Long term, especially if you have a long-term land lease, you can possibly make that back up in the years after that," he said.

Yunker noted another factor to keep in mind when farming organically is the different input costs.

Although he isn't putting money into conventional herbicides and pesticides, his money still goes other places.

"Instead of herbicides, we're spending it on diesel fuel or more equipment to manage the weeds," he said. "Then our fertilizer cost is probably about the same because we're pretty much limited to just animal manure."

The chicken manure Yunker uses as fertilizer is in high demand as more producers transition to organic production. He told field day attendees that

highly pathogenic avian influenza also caused disruptions after his supplier shut down and forced him to find an alternative source. The setback delayed planting and resulted in a harvest that fell well short of his target yield.

Despite those challenges, Yunker has seen improvements in soil health on his own farm since transitioning to organic production and incorporating cover crops. He expects to see similar results on the preserve's land as he follows his planned organic crop rotation of corn, cereal rye and soybeans.

Yunker's acreage is unique because it operates alongside conventionally farmed ground leased by other preserve tenants. Wallace said both organic and conventional farmers play an important role in maintaining soil health and preventing the land from becoming overgrown with weeds or invasive species.

To protect the integrity of Yunker's organic operation, he maintains a prairie buffer strip between the organic and conventional fields. The strip also provides habitat for pollinators and other native species.

"They provide just great buffer zones," Wallace said.

Other field day speakers focused on soil health included University of Illinois researchers Andrew Margenot and Luke Bergschneider, who discussed how various management practices affect soil conditions. Attendees also boarded a hayrack for a tour of the organic field Yunker leases from the forest preserve and two soil pits excavated for the event.

Soil pits expose the soil profile, allowing researchers and farmers to evaluate soil health beneath the surface. **Illinois State Soil Scientist Ron Collman** used the soil pits to explain how factors such as parent material, topography, drainage and past management practices influence soil health and productivity.

Collman pointed to signs of erosion, compaction, root growth and earthworm activity in Yunker's soil. He noted practices such as cover crops and reduced disturbance can improve soil structure, nutrient cycling and water infiltration over time. Examining the soil below the surface, he said, helps farmers better understand how their fields function and make management decisions accordingly.



Illinois State Soil Scientist **Ron Collman** uses soil pits to explain how factors such as parent material, topography, drainage and past management practices influence soil health.

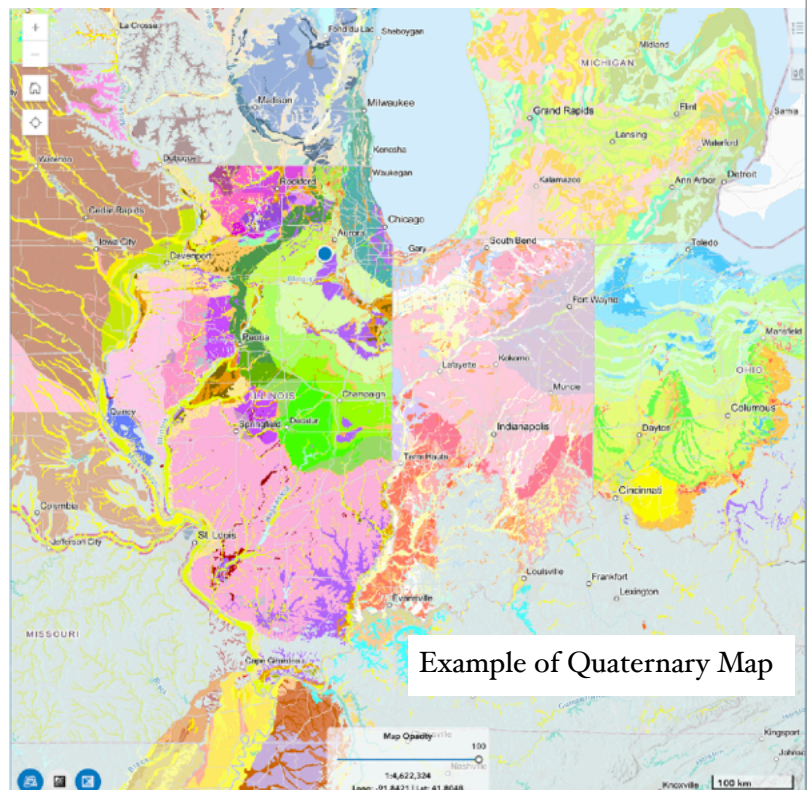
The Cooperative National Geologic Map

Developed by the USGS and the State Geological Surveys (AASG)

Our Nation's geology informs decisions about resource management, critical mineral assessment, water quality modeling, infrastructure development, and risks posed by natural hazards. The geologic layers were compiled using a standardized process, funded by the USGS National Cooperative Geologic Mapping Program. For more site-specific information, refer to the detailed geologic maps, and resources available in the National Geologic Map Database and from the Association of American State Geologists.

Check it out: <https://ngmdb.usgs.gov/nationalgeology/>

submitted by Mary Beth Falsey



2026 ISCA Hydric Soils Class

ISCA celebrates 25 years of hydric soils classes

“Hydric Soils for Wetland Delineation Course, Part 2”, an ISCA sponsored field class, was held August 6-7 in Lake County, Illinois. It was called “Part 2” because a hydric soils class was held in Lake County 2025. The 2026 class, although it stood by itself, was a follow-up to that course and offered more field experience, including experience with hydric sandy soils. Other sponsors of the course were the Lake County Stormwater Management Commission, Lake County Forest Preserves, V3 Companies, Engineering Resource Associates, DuPage County Stormwater Management, and M&M Soils, LLC.

Day 1 included a morning review of hydric soil principles, held in the Lake SMC classroom in Libertyville. The afternoon consisted of field exercises in lacustrine/alluvial sediments at Independence Grove Forest Preserve near Libertyville.

Day 2 was all in the field. Lyons Woods Forest Preserve near Zion was the morning site and included loamy outwash soils and some manipulated soils. The afternoon was at Spring Bluff Forest Preserve near Winthrop Harbor and was all hydric sandy soils.

There were 31 in attendance which included 18 paid participants, sponsored participants, SMC staff, and ISCA instructors. Special thanks to the sponsors

and all who helped make this class a success. ISCA instructors were: Ken Anderson, Mark Bramstedt, Clayton Heffter, Mary Beth Falsey, and Alicia Metzger.

The Illinois Soil Classifiers Association members have been teaching a hydric soils class since the year 2001. That first class was held in DeKalb. Originally the course was taught in cooperation with NRCS. Instructors in 2001 were: Robert McLeese, Don Fehrenbacher, Mark Bramstedt, Roger Windhorn, Ken Gotsch, and Steven Zwicker.

In 2005, ISCA taught its first stand-alone class, also in DeKalb. The ISCA courses have always been self-supporting. Several members were involved in the planning and execution of the 2005 course. ISCA members on that planning committee were: Jaimee Hammit, Clayton Heffter, Ken Anderson, Pat Kelsey, Dale Calsyn, Mark Bramstedt, Jennifer (Wollenweber) Smith, and Todd Soukup. Instructors included Jaimee Hammit, Clayton Heffter, Ken Anderson, Pat Kelsey, Dale Calsyn, Mark Bramstedt, Roger Windhorn, Ken Gotsch, and Steven Zwicker. Dale, Mark, Roger, Ken and Steve also served as the field instructors.

Although the course isn't always annual, ISCA members have taught 17 hydric soils courses out of 25 years, from 2001 to 2026, with hopes to continue.



The 2026 *“Hydric Soils for Wetland Delineation Course - Part 2”* class with instructors and sponsors.

The stories great rivers tell:
ACES professor emeritus Kenneth R. Olson completes 12-book journey
by: Leslie Myrick, ACES News July 23, 2026

The great rivers of the world function not only as physical landscapes, but also as complex systems shaped by human intervention, warfare, and climate change as explored in a series of books by emeritus soil scientist and environmental researcher Kenneth R. Olson.

Olson, retired since 2014 from the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Sciences (NRES), part of the College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, has recently published his twelfth book to complete a series on the environmental, historical, and political dimensions of the world's great river landscapes and deltas.

"Each great river I have researched has a story to tell. They serve as pathways for immigration and invasions, and because of sediment deposition they provide the most productive soils in a region with regards to food production. Human decisions and interventions have caused long term damage to these environments and the health of humans who live nearby. Through this book series, I have highlighted the importance of field-based research, documentation, and interdisciplinary collaborations to understand the long-term impacts of these interventions on river systems and the need for environmental stewardship," Olson said

While still working in ACES, Olson began documenting extensive soil damage after the 2008 flooding of the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers, but as a U.S. Army Vietnam Era veteran, he was drawn to study the Mekong River after retiring and subsequently wrote several journal articles and two books about this landscape, specifically the collateral damage from Agent Blue herbicide used to destroy rice crops and other food supplies.

Although his initial institutional research on flooding in North America was supported by the USDA and the U. of I. , he has self-funded and coordinated most of his retirement research.

In total, Olson has published 82 papers on the world's great river landscapes. He wrote the Great Rivers of the World and Warfare-Soils book series to reach a wider audience.

"This is probably my last book to wrap up this topic. I hoped to complete my great river landscapes book mission by my 80th birthday, which will be in 2027. Mission accomplished. However, my family and friends are skeptical that I will be able to give up my adventures based around these topics because I have enjoyed it so much," Olson said.

Olson was interviewed about his book series by *Pollution and Diseases*. Read the interview here: <https://pollution-diseases-ojs.org/index.php/pd/article/view/18>



Latest published research by Dr. Olson:

"Merry Band of Vietnam War Era Retirees: Creation Mission, Finding, and Continuing Research" in *Pollution and Diseases*, August 9, 2026

Find it here: <https://pollution-diseases-ojs.org/index.php/pd/article/view/56/53>



www.illinoissoils.org

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)

