Region V Soil Judging Handbook

Hosted by University of Nebraska at Omaha

SEPTEMBER 28 – OCTOBER 3, 2025

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Preface

The University of Nebraska at Omaha is looking forward to welcoming you to the Omaha area on September 28 – October 3, 2025.

This handbook provides information about the 2025 Region 5 Soil Judging Contest. This manual provides the rules, scorecard instructions, and additional information about the contest. This material has been adapted from previous handbooks, with some modification. Other references used to develop this handbook include *Soil Survey Manual* (Soil Division Staff, 1993), *Field Book for Describing and Sampling Soils v 3.0* (Schoeneberger et al., 2012), *Keys to Soil Taxonomy 12th edition* (Soil Survey Staff, 2014), *Soil Taxonomy 2nd edition* (Soil Survey Staff, 1999) the *Illustrated Guide to Soil Taxonomy v 2* (Soil Survey Staff, 2015), and *Field Indicators of Hydric Soils in the United States v. 8.2* (USDA-NRCS, 2018) and *v. 9.0* (Vasilas et al. 2024). In keeping with recent contests, emphasis is placed on fundamentals such as soil morphology, taxonomy, and soil-landscape relationships.

Soil Judging remains the most important experiential opportunity for soils students. In a short period of time, students gain tremendous depth of experience in reading landscapes, describing soil profiles, and making use and suitability interpretations. In a much deeper sense, students learn to be bridge builders, connecting with people through a shared love of the land and the soil resource that crosses cultural, socioeconomic, and political boundaries. For this reason, Soil Judgers are world-changers, representing the heart and soul of our institutions.

We are appreciative of the support we are receiving in this planning process, particularly USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service staff Casey Latta, Greg Paesl, Sean Coughlin and Elizabeth Grey as well as staff from the Nebraska Natural Resource Districts at Chalco Hills and Lake Wanahoo. Many, many thanks for the support and assistance from Tyler Frederick, Meg Perry, Bennett Amador, Tracy Coleman, Tom Bragg, Barbi Hayes, Jerome Masek, Daniel Simon, Gifford Farm, Kelly Taylor, Brenda Todd, Rex Cammack, Paul Hunt, Jon Scheuth, Harmon Maher, Doug Dere, and Sue Diaz. Furthermore, sponsorship from the Nebraska Geological Society, UNO College of Arts and Sciences, UNO Department of Geography/Geology, and the Denton Foundation are greatly appreciated.

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Introduction

Soil judging provides an opportunity for students to study soils through direct experience in the field. Students learn to describe soil properties, identify different kinds of soils and associated landscape features, and interpret soil information for agriculture and other land uses. These skills are developed by studying a variety of soils formed from a wide range of parent materials and vegetation in different topographic settings. It is hoped that by learning about soils and their formation, students will gain an appreciation for soil as a natural resource. We all depend on soil for growing crops and livestock, building materials, replenishing water supplies, and waste disposal. It is increasingly clear that if we do not take care of our soils, loss of productivity and environmental degradation follow. By understanding more about soils and their management through activities like soil judging, we stand a better chance of conserving soil and other natural resources for future generations.

Students in soil judging participate in regional and national contests held annually in different states. These contests are an enjoyable and valuable learning experience, giving students an opportunity to get a first-hand view of soils and land use outside their home areas. As an activity within the American Society of Agronomy, soil judging in the United States is divided into seven regions. Our Region V includes universities from the states of Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota. Collegiate soil judging originated in the southeastern United States in 1956 and began in the Midwest in 1958 with a contest hosted by Kansas State University. Today, over 40 universities are involved with soil judging through the American Society of Agronomy.

This guidebook is organized into several sections that describe the format and content of the contest. The contest involves soil description and interpretation at sites by students, who record their observations on a scorecard. The content sections of this guidebook follow the organization of soil and related information given on the contest scorecard. Those sections include site characteristics, soil morphology, soil hydrology and profile properties, soil classification, and soil interpretations.

This guidebook contains information related to the 2025 Region V Soil Judging Contest. Coaches are encouraged to consult other sources of information as well including the *Soil Survey Manual* (Soil Division Staff, 1993), *Field Book for Describing and Sampling Soils v 3.0* (Schoeneberger et al., 2012), Simplified version of *Keys to Soil Taxonomy 12th edition* (Soil Survey Staff, 2014), *Soil Taxonomy 2nd edition* (Soil Survey Staff, 1999) the *Illustrated Guide to Soil Taxonomy v 2* (Soil Survey Staff, 2015), and *Field Indicators of Hydric Soils of the United States Version 8.2* (USDA NRCS, 2018). Other resources available for coaches to consult include web soil survey, official series descriptions, Google Earth, and traditional soil surveys for block diagrams and narratives. Specific sources of information for this contest are also included in the References section. Many portions of the text in this guidebook have been adapted from previous Region V contest guidebooks and we recognize that contributions of those writers to this effort.

Contest Rules, Scoring, and Procedures

Table 1. Contest Events and Tentative Schedule

Date/Time	Activity	Location	Notes
Sunday, September 28	Coaches visit practice pits 12 – 6pm	Meet at Durham Science Center Parking Lot F, 6001 Dodge Street	Practice keys will be available at site visits, otherwise available at packet pickup
Sunday, September 28	Pick up team packets 6pm	1911 S 67th St, Omaha, NE	Informal social/dinner on your own at Inner Rail Food Hall; Packet pickup on lawn outside
Monday, Sep. 29	Practice Pits	Omaha area	Team rotation schedule will be provided in packet pickup
Monday, Sep. 29	Coaches Meeting, 5-6:30pm	Kinkaider Brewing Co., 2279 S 67th St, Omaha, NE	
Tuesday, Sep. 30	Practice Pits	Omaha area	
Tuesday, Sep. 30	Contest Banquet and Geology Talk; 6:30-8:30pm	Elmwood Park Pavillion	TBD
Wednesday, Oct. 1	Practice Pits	Omaha area	Individual contestants identified by 7PM.
Thursday, Oct. 2	Contest Day	TBD	Lunch provided with registration
Friday, Oct. 3	Awards Breakfast; 7:30am	TBD	Breakfast provided

Individual and Team Contests.

The individual and team contests will be held on **Thursday, October 2** and will consist of five sites: two individual-judged sites in the morning and three team-judged sites in the afternoon. At each site, a pit will be excavated, and control area(s) will be designated for the measurement of horizon depths and boundaries. The control area will constitute the officially scored profile and must remain undisturbed and unblocked by contestants. A tape measure will be fixed within the control area.

The site number, number of horizons to be described, the profile depth to be described, and any additional information or laboratory data deemed necessary for correct classification will be provided to contestants. Typically, six horizons will be described at each pit. However, up to seven horizons could be required to give the best understanding of the parent materials for each pit. Some pits may also have less than six horizons. A marker (i.e. nail) will be placed at the base of the third horizon. A pit/site monitor at each site will enforce the rules, answer any questions, keep time limits, clean the soil from the base of the pit as needed and/or requested, and assure all contestants have an equal opportunity to judge the soil.

A team usually consists of four contestants from each school but can be as few as three. A limited number of alternates may participate in the judging of the contest sites, depending upon space availability (check with contest leader(s) in advance). However, the coach must designate the four official contestants prior to the contest (by 7:00 PM Wednesday, October 1, 2025). The individual scorecards of the alternates will also be graded but not counted in the team score for the contest. Alternates are eligible for individual awards and can participate in the team judging. Each school will be allowed one team for the "Team Judging" part of the contest.

General Grading Criteria

All scorecards will be graded by hand. To avoid ambiguity, all contestants are urged to write clearly and use only those abbreviations provided. Ambiguous or unrecognizable answers will receive no credit. Designated abbreviations or the corresponding, clearly written terminology will be graded as correct responses. Scorecards will be graded by a minimum of two coaches, assistant coaches or contest personnel from different schools. A coach or assistant coach cannot be the first to grade a scorecard from their own students. Coaches and assistant coaches may be the second to grade scorecards from their own students if necessary.Contest Equipment and Materials

Contestants provide the following materials for their own use:

- clipboard
- calculator
- water bottle
- hand lens
- knife
- rock hammer
- tape measure
- acid bottle (10% HCl)
- clinometer or Abney level
- No. 2 pencils (required)*
- Munsell Color Charts
- containers for soil samples
- 2mm sieve
- hand towel

**A No. 2 pencil is required because of the waterproof paper used for the official scorecards. An ink pen will not work when the scorecards are wet.*

This will be an "open book" contest. Any relevant written materials (including this handbook and practice sheets) will be allowed in the contest. A clinometer, knife, and color book will be provided at each pit for emergency situations as well as extra water, acid (10% HCl), and blank scorecards. Contestants are not allowed to have mobile phones during the contest under any circumstances. If a contest official sees one, that contestant will be disqualified for both the individual and team events.

Each site will have its own scorecard designated by a unique border color. Each individual or team contestant will be given a packet during the contest that contains scorecards with sticker colors corresponding to each site. Since this is an open book contest, an extra set of abbreviations will not be provided, and contestants should use the set of abbreviations in their handbook.

Student Scorecard Responsibilities

Students must correctly enter the pit number and nail depth on their scorecard. Scorecard entries must be recorded according to the instructions for each specific feature to be judged (see following sections of the handbook). Only one response should be entered in each blank, unless otherwise specified. The official judges may decide to recognize more than one correct answer to allow partial credit for alternative answers. Entries for soil morphology may be recorded using the provided abbreviations or as a complete word. Contestants should enter the depth of the last horizon (if a boundary) or a dash to specify a completed response.

Contest Timing

Contestants will be allowed sixty (60) minutes to judge each individual site. The time in and out of the pit for the individually judged sites will be as follows: 5 minutes in/out, 5 minutes out/in, 10 minutes in/out, 10 minutes out/in, 5 minutes in/out, 5 minutes out/in, and 20 minutes free time for all to finish. The contestants who are first "in" and "out" will switch between the two individual pits to allow equal opportunity for all contestants to be first in or first out (i.e. each contestant should be in the pit first on one pit and out of the pit first on the other pit). Two members of each team will describe the left pit face and other two team members will describe the right pit face. NOTE: This timing schedule may be modified depending on the number of teams and contestants participating. However, everyone will have at minimum 60 minutes at each site.

For team judging, we will have a large pit with two control sections that will allow two teams to be in the pit at the same time. The tentative timing will be 10 minutes in, 10 minutes out, 10 minutes in, 10 minutes out, 10 minutes in, 10 minutes to finish. Each team will have a minimum of 60 minutes at each site, including 30 minutes alone at the control section. This timing may change if coaches request a change.

Team Scoring

The overall team score will be the aggregate of the top three individual scores at each individually judged site plus the team judged sites. In the case where a team is comprised of only three members, all individual scores will count towards the team's overall score. Individual scores will be determined by summing the three site scores for each contestant (Table 2).

Table 2. Example team score calculation for individual sites.

Contestant	Individual Site 1	Individual Site 2	Individual Score
1	212	196	408
2	230	204	434
3	190	183	373
4	200	174	375
Team Score	642*	583*	

*Top three scores added for team score for each site. The final team score will consist of scores from the three team judged pits plus the top three scores for the individually judged pits.

Tie-Break Rules

The clay content of one horizon at one of the individually judged sites will be used to break ties in team and individual scores. To break a tie in team scores, the mean clay content will be calculated from the estimates provided by all the contestants of a given team. The team with the mean estimates closest to the actual value will receive higher placing. If this method does not break the tie, the next lowest horizon of the same site will be used in the same manner until the tie is broken. In the event of a tie in individual scores, the clay content of the tie breaker horizon will be compared to that estimated by everyone. The individual with the estimate closest to the actual value will receive the higher placing. If this does not break the tie, the next lowest horizon at the same site will be used in the same manner until the tie is broken.

Contest Results

Final contest results will be announced at a breakfast awards ceremony on Friday morning, October 3, 2025. Every effort will be made to avoid errors in determining the contest results. However, the results presented at the awards ceremony are final. Trophies will be awarded to the top four teams overall, the top four teams in team judging competition, and the top ten individuals. Placings in the overall team score will be used to determine the teams qualifying for the National Collegiate Soil Judging Contest. According to current rules, the top three, if 4-7 teams participate, or four, if 8-9 teams participate, from Region 5 will qualify for the 2025 National Contest.

Scorecard Instructions

The scorecard (attached at the end of this guidebook) consists of five parts:

A. Site Characteristics
B. Soil Morphology
C. Soil Hydrology and Profile Properties
D. Soil Classification
E. Site Interpretations

Numbers in parentheses after each item in a section indicate the points scored for one correct judgment. If a pedon has more than one parent material, diagnostic subsurface horizon, or applicable subgroup, five points will be awarded for each correct answer. In these sections of the scorecard, negative credit (minus 5 points for each incorrect answer, with a minimum score of zero for any section) will be used to reduce guessing. More than one entry in other items of the scorecard will be considered incorrect and will result in no credit for that item. Official judges, in consultation with a quorum of coaches, have the prerogative of giving full or partial credit for alternative answers to fit a given site or condition (e.g., hydraulic conductivity where 3 points are given if the answer is close to the correct answer).

A. Site Characteristics

A-1. Landform

A landform is a physical, recognizable form or feature of the Earth's surface that usually has a characteristic shape and is produced by natural causes. Parent materials are commonly associated with particular landforms. The landforms recognized for this contest are:

Depression: Low-lying areas that collect water from the localized areas and are not fully integrated into the drainage system.

Floodplain: A nearly level alluvial plain that borders a stream and is subject to flooding unless artificially protected. The floodplain refers to the lowest level or levels associated with a stream valley and is sometimes referred to as bottom soil, stream bottom, or first bottom. Sediments may or may not be stratified. Soils found in a floodplain position normally have little profile development beneath the A horizon other than a structure or color horizon. If coarse fragments are present, they are normally rounded or subrounded.

Terrace: Stream terraces are a step-like surface or platform along a stream valley that represents a remnant of an abandoned floodplain. Where occurring in valley floors, this landform is commonly smooth, having low relief, and may or may not be dissected by an under-fitted stream. It consists of a relatively level surface, cut or built by a stream and a steeper descending slope (scarp or riser).

Paleoterrace: Remnants of stream terraces that retain the surface form and alluvial deposits from their origin but were not formed by the present-day stream or drainage network

Upland: Upland refers to geomorphic landforms, not otherwise designated, that are generally above present-day valleys and which may be underlain by bedrock or sediments of glacial, eolian, or colluvial/pedisediment materials.

A-2. Parent Material

Parent material refers to the material in which soils form. Parent materials include bedrock, various kinds of unconsolidated sediments, and "pre-weathered" materials. Soils may be developed in more than one parent material and this should be indicated on the scorecard. For this contest, parent material should be ≥ 30 cm thick if it is on the surface or ≥ 10 cm thick if at least 30 cm below the soil surface to be indicated on the scorecard. A different parent material should also be indicated if it is present in the last horizon of the described profile.

Alluvium: Alluvium consists of sediment transported and deposited by running water and is associated with landforms such as floodplains of existing streams or rivers. The sediments may be of either a general or local origin and may be stratified due to particle size sorting by running water, although stratification may or may not be evident. Rock fragments are often rounded in shape.

Old Alluvium: Old alluvium consists of sediment transported and deposited by running water in the past that are now associated with paleoterrace landforms or terraces above the present streams. The sediments may be of either a general or local origin and may be stratified due to particle size sorting by running water, although stratification may or may not be evident. Rock fragments are often rounded in shape.

Colluvium: A general term applied to any loose, heterogeneous, and incoherent mass of soil material and/or rock fragments deposited by rainwash, sheetwash, or slow, continuous downslope creep, usually collecting at the base of gentle slopes or hillsides. Agricultural activities have influenced the landscape across most of Nebraska, so local hillslope sediments may exist in the footslope on top of the previous soil surface. This local hillslope sediment will also be included in this option for this contest.

Eolian Sand: These well-sorted, fine to very fine sands are generally found down-wind of a river valley or body of water. Interbedding, or layers of deposition that may intersect and may look like alluvial stratified materials but are at angles.

Glacial Till / Outwash: Unsorted, nonstratified glacial drift consisting of clay, silt, sand, and boulders transported and deposited by glacial ice. Includes mainly sandy or coarse textured material of glaciofluvial origin. While it may occur by itself, you may find a layer of outwash-like material at the top of a glacial till deposit. Therefore, this material is lumped with Glacial Till.

Loess: Loess consists of fine-textured, wind-deposited sediment that is dominantly of silt size (or in some cases very fine sands). Loess may contain significant amounts of clay, depending on the distance from the loess source. Silt loam and silty clay loam textures are commonly found in the loess of this area.

Residuum: Materials weathered in place from underlying bedrock.

A-3. Slope

Slope refers to the inclination of the ground surface and has length, shape, and gradient. Gradient is usually expressed in percent slope and is the difference in elevation, in length units, for each one hundred units of horizontal distance. Slope may be measured by an Abney level or by a clinometer. Slope classes are based on the gradient. Stakes or markers will be provided at each site for determining slope and the slope should be measured between these two markers. **The tops of the markers will be placed at the same height, but it is the responsibility of the contestant to make sure that they have not been disturbed.** If the slope measurement falls on the boundary between two slope classes, contestants should mark the steeper class on the scorecard. Contestants may want to write the actual slope value in the margin of the scorecard to aid in the completion of the interpretations section.

A-4. Hillslope Position

The slope positions given below and shown in the diagram (from Ruhe, 1969) represent geomorphic segments of the topography in which the soil is located. These slope components have characteristic geometries and greatly influence soils through differences in slope stability, water movement, and other slope processes. **Hillslope positions at the contest site should be determined by the dominant position between the slope markers**.

Summit: The highest level of an upland landform with a relatively gentle slope. It is often the most stable part of a landscape. If the site is on a summit and has a slope < 2%, the summit should be selected on the scorecard.

Shoulder: The rounded (convex-up) hillslope component below the summit. It is the transitional zone from the summit to the backslope and is erosional in origin.

Backslope: The steepest slope position that forms the principal segment of many hillslopes. It is commonly linear along the slope and is also erosional in origin. It is located between the shoulder and footslope positions.

Footslope: The slope position at the base of a hillslope that is commonly rounded, concave-up along the slope. It is transitional between the erosional backslope and depositional toeslope. Accumulation of sediments often occurs at this slope position. If the site is on a footslope and has a slope of < 2%, the footslope should be selected on the scorecard.

None: This designation will be used when slope at the site is < 1% and the site is not in a well-defined example of one of the slope positions given above. This includes toeslope positions or broad nearly level positions on stream terraces or floodplains.

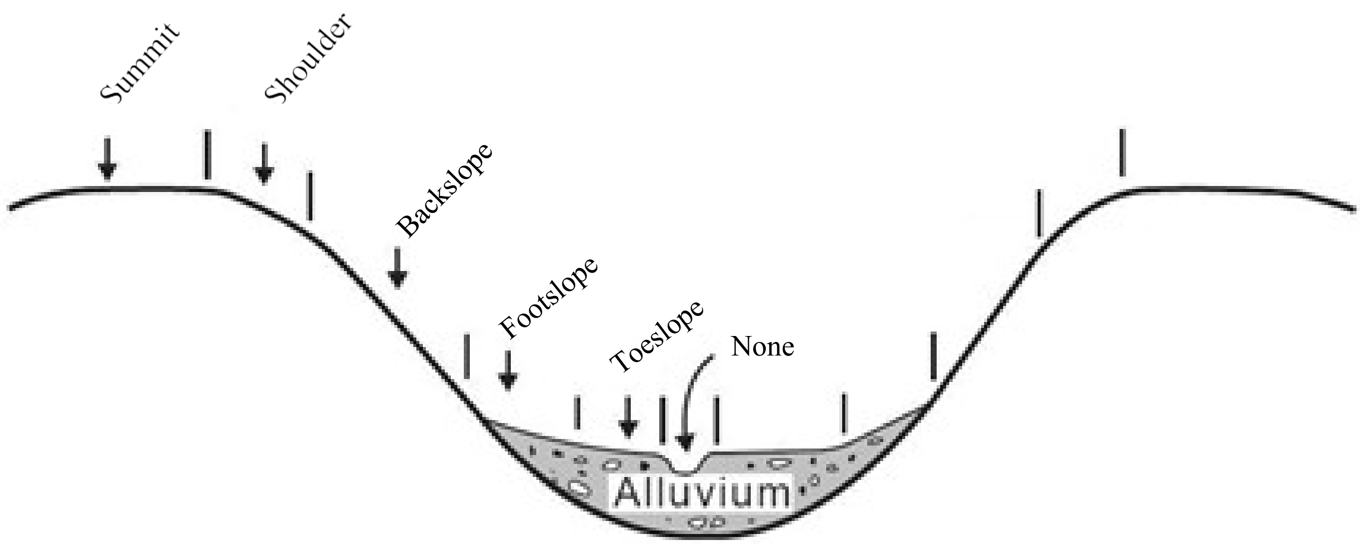


Figure 1. Illustration of hillslope positions.

B. Soil Morphology

For entering answers in the morphology section of the scorecard, the provided standard abbreviations may be used, or the word(s) may be written out. Abbreviations or words that are ambiguous or may be interpreted as an incorrect answer will not receive credit. The Munsell color notation (e.g., 10YR 4/2) should be used and not the color names. If spaces on the scorecard for the soil morphology section do not require an answer (e.g., if no concentrations are present in a horizon), a dash or blank in those spaces will be considered correct. The Field Book for Describing and Sampling Soils (version 3.0, 2012), Chapter 3 of the Soil Survey Manual (1993) entitled, "Examination and Description of Soils", and Chapter 18 of Keys to Soil Taxonomy 12th Edition (2014) entitled "Designations for Horizons and Layers" should be used as a guide for horizon symbols and descriptions.

B-1. Boundary

B-1-1. Depth of Lower Boundary

Boundary depths are determined (in centimeters) from the soil mineral surface to the middle of the lower boundary of each horizon (if an O horizon is present, measurements begin at the base of the O horizon). For reference as to the position of the soil surface, the depth from the soil surface to the nail in the **base of the third horizon** is posted on the pit card or information sheet. The total soil profile depth to be described will also be given on the pit information card or sheet.

If the total soil profile depth corresponds to the lower boundary of the last horizon, the horizon boundary depth should be described. Otherwise, a dash or the total soil profile depth with a + sign (e.g., 100+) should be entered on the scorecard. Note that boundary depths should be judged from the tape measure anchored to the pit face and vertical to the nail within the control section. Measurements of boundary depth should be made in the undisturbed area of the pit reserved for this purpose. Therefore, for horizons with wavy boundaries, the boundary depth at the tape should be recorded rather than an estimate of the middle of the wavy boundary across the control section.

Boundary measurements should be made at the center of the boundary separating the two horizons, particularly when the boundary distinctness is not abrupt. Answers for lower boundary depths will be considered correct if within the following limits above or below the depth determined by the official judges: for **abrupt** (including very abrupt) boundaries +/- 1 cm; for **clear** boundaries +/- 2 cm; for **gradual** boundaries +/- 4 cm; and for **diffuse** boundaries +/- 8 cm. Partial credit for depth measurements may be given at the discretion of the official judges where the boundary is not smooth.

If a lithic or paralithic contact occurs at or above the specific judging depth, the contact should be marked as a subsurface feature in Part D of the scorecard and should be considered in evaluating the hydraulic conductivity, effective rooting depth, and water retention to 150 cm. Otherwise, the lowest horizon should be mentally extended to a depth of 150 cm for making all relevant evaluations. When a lithic or paralithic contact occurs within the specified judging depth, the contact should be considered as one of the requested horizons, and the appropriate horizon nomenclature should be applied (e.g., Cr or R). However, morphological features of Cr or R horizons need not be provided in Part A of the scorecard. If the contestant gives morphological information for a designated Cr or R horizon, the information will be ignored and will not count against the contestant's score. If you are not sure if a layer is a Cr horizon or not, you are encouraged to fill in the morphological information for that layer so you do not lose many points if the layer is not a Cr horizon.

B-1-2. Distinctness of Boundary

The distinctness of boundaries separating various horizons must be described if they fall within the designated profile depth indicated by the judges for each site. Categories of distinctness of boundaries are:

Table 3. Soil horizon boundary distinctness category.

Boundary	Abbreviation	Boundary Distinctness
Abrupt	**A**	< 2 cm
Clear	**C**	2.1 to 5 cm
Gradual	**G**	5.1 to 15 cm
Diffuse	**D**	> 15 cm

There will be no distinctness category given for the last horizon, unless a lithic or paralithic contact exists at the lower boundary. A dash or a blank is acceptable for distinctness of the last horizon to be described when a lithic or paralithic contact is not present.

B-2. Structure

Soil structure refers to the aggregation of primary soil particles into secondary compound groups or clusters of particles. These units are separated by natural planes, zones, or surfaces of weakness. Dominant type (formerly called shape) and grade of structure for each horizon are to be judged. If the horizon lacks definite structural arrangements or if there is no observable aggregation, "**structureless**" should be recorded in the grade column and either "**massive**" or "**single grain**" (whichever is appropriate) should be recorded in the Type column. Clear depositional layers, potentially due to aeolian deposition, alluvial/lacustrine deposits, or glacial till over-consolidation will not be recognized as developed soil structure, so "**geogenic structure**" should be indicated on the structure type box, with a "0" for grade.

If various types of structure exist within the horizon, contestants should record the type and grade of structure that is most dominant. Compound structure (e.g., prismatic parting to angular or subangular blocky structure) is common in some soils. In this case, structure having the stronger grade should be described. If the structures are of equal grade, the structure type with the largest peds should be described. **The term "blocky" always requires a modifier, either angular or subangular blocky**. Blocky will not receive full credit if used alone.

B-2-1. Grade

The grade of structure is determined by the distinctness of the aggregates and their durability. Expression of structure grade is often moisture dependent and so may change with drying of the soil.

Table 4. Structural Grades

Grade	Code	Description
Structureless	0	The condition in which there is no observable aggregation or no definite, orderly arrangement of natural lines of weakness.
Weak	1	The soil breaks into very few poorly formed, indistinct peds, most of which are destroyed in the process of removal. The shape of structure is barely observable in place.
Moderate	2	The soil contains well-formed, distinct peds in the disturbed soil when removed by hand. They are moderately durable with little unaggregated material. The shape of structure observed in the undisturbed pit face may be indistinct.
Strong	3	Durable peds are very evident in undisturbed soil of the pit face with very little or no unaggregated material when peds are removed from the soil. The peds adhere weakly to one another, are rigid upon displacement, and become separated when the soil is disturbed.

B-2-2. Type

Types of soil structure are described below, modified from the *Field Book for Describing and Sampling Soils, version 3.0,2012.*

Table 5. Structural Types

Type	Abbreviation	Description
Granular	GR	Spheroids or polyhedrons bound by curved planes or very irregular surfaces which have slight or no accommodation to the faces of surrounding peds. The aggregates may or may not be highly porous.
Platy	PL	Plate-like with the horizontal dimension significantly greater than the vertical dimension. Plates are approximately parallel to the soil surface.
Subangular Blocky	SBK	Polyhedron-like structural units that are approximately the same size in all dimensions. Peds have mixed rounded and flattened faces with many rounded vertices. These structural units are casts of the molds formed by the faces of the surrounding peds
Angular Blocky	ABK	Similar to subangular blocky but block-like units have flattened faces and many sharply angular vertices.
Prismatic	PR	Prism-like with the two horizontal dimensions considerably less than the vertical. Vertical faces are well defined and arranged around a vertical line with angular vertices. The structural units have angular tops or caps.
Columnar	COL	Same as prismatic but with rounded tops or caps.
Wedge	WEG	Elliptical, interlocking lenses that terminate in acute angles, bounded by slickensides. Characteristic in Vertisols but may be present in other soils.
Massive	MA	No structure is apparent, and the material is coherent.
Single-Grained	SGR	No structure is apparent, and soil fragments and single mineral grains do not cohere (e.g., loose sand).
Geogenic or Depositional	GS	These unaltered depositional layers may break out in plate-like shapes (alluvial or aeolian sand) or unweathered glacial till that breaks out with sharp corners/edges due to consolidation. Associated with a "C" horizon.

B-3. Concentrations and Redoximorphic Features

Redoximorphic (redox) features (RMF) are caused by the reduction and oxidation of iron and manganese associated with soil wetness/dryness and not rock color. Characteristic color patterns are created by these processes. Redox features are colors in soils resulting from the concentration (gain) or depletion (loss) of pigment when compared to the soil matrix color. Reduced iron (Fe^{2+}) and manganese (Mn^{2+}) ions may be removed from a soil if vertical or lateral fluxes of water occur. Wherever iron and manganese are oxidized and precipitated, they form either soft masses or hard concretions and nodules. Redox features are used for identifying aquic conditions and determining soil wetness class. Movement of iron and manganese because of redox processes in a soil may result in redoximorphic features.

The color of the redox feature must differ from that of the soil matrix by at least one color chip to be described. **For determination of a seasonal high-water table, depletions of chroma 2 or less and value of 4 or more must be present *and* a soil must have current hydrologic conditions (e.g., water table, landscape position, etc.).** If this color requirement is not met, the depletions should be described, but the depletions do not affect the soil wetness class or site interpretations. Low chroma (≤ 2) in the soil may be due to drainage, parent material, or other features. However, parent material variations and other such features should not be considered in evaluating soil wetness or soil drainage characteristics. Colors associated with the following mottled features will not be considered as redox features: carbonates, krotovina, rock colors (lithochromic colors), roots, or mechanical mixtures of horizons such as B horizon materials in an Ap horizon.

B-3-1. RMF Concentrations

Redox Concentrations – These are zones of apparent pedogenic accumulation of Fe-Mn oxides, and include: nodules and concretions (firm, irregular shaped bodies with diffuse to sharp boundaries; masses (soft bodies of variable shapes in the soil matrix; zones of high chroma color (“red/orange” forFe and “black”/purple for Mn); and pore linings (zones of accumulation along pores). Dominant processes involved are chemical dissolution and precipitation; oxidation and reduction; and physical and/or biological removal, transport and accrual. If redox concentrations are present, contestants should estimate the abundance using the following categories. Horizons that do not have RMF concentrations present should be marked with a “-“.

Presence: **Yes (Y) – RMF concentrations are present**
No (N, -, or blank) – RMF concentrations are not present

B-3-2. RMF Depletions

Redox Depletions – RMF Depletions are zones of pedogenic removal of Fe-MN oxides. These are low-chroma bodies that include iron depletions, clay depletions, depleted matrices, and reduced matrices. They may occur in the matrix, in pore linings, or along ped faces. RMF depletions form through the same processes described above for RMF concentrations. However, depletions form where Fe-MN has been removed. In surface horizons these features are often masked by soil organic matter. If RMP depletions are present, contestants should mark “Y” or “Yes”. Horizons that do not have RMF depletions present should be marked with a “-“.

Presence: **Yes (Y) – RMF depletions are present**
No (N, -, or blank) – RMF depletions are not present

Reduced Matrix – This is a soil matrix that has low chroma (2 or less) and the color value is usually 4 or more.

Reduced matrix would be used when a horizon has a “g” subordinate distinction (subhorizon) designation. This feature is not included separately on the scorecard, but **if a reduced matrix is identified for a horizon, redox depletions should also be marked**.

The color of the redox feature must differ from that of the soil matrix by at least one color chip in order to be described. For determination of a seasonal high water table, depletions of chroma 2 or less and value of 4 or more must be present. If this color requirement is not met, the depletions should be described, but the depletions do not affect the soil wetness class or site interpretations. Low chroma (≤ 2) in the soil may be due to drainage, parent material, or other features. However, parent material variations and other such features should not be considered in evaluating soil wetness or soil drainage characteristics. Colors associated with the following mottled features will not be considered as redox features: carbonates, krotovina, rock colors (lithochromic colors), roots, or mechanical mixtures of horizons such as B horizon materials in an Ap horizon.

B-4. Color

Munsell soil color charts are used to determine the moist soil matrix color for each horizon described. Color must be designated by hue, value, and chroma. Space is provided to enter the hue, value, and chroma for each horizon separately on the scorecard. At the discretion of the official judges, more than one color may be given full credit. Color is to be judged for each horizon by selecting soil material to represent that horizon. For all horizons selected peds should be collected from near the central part of the horizon and broken to expose the matrix. If peds are dry, they should be moistened before the matrix color is determined. Moist color is that color when there is no further change in soil color when additional water is added. For Bt horizons with continuous clay films, care should be taken to ensure that the color of a ped interior rather than a clay film is described for the matrix color. For neutral colors (N hues), the chroma is 0.

NOTE: In previous contests a moist, rubbed (mixed) sample was used to color the surface horizon. This will not be the case for this contest.

B-5. Texture

Texture refers to the proportion of sand, silt, and clay-sized particles in soil. These proportions are expressed on a percentage basis, with sand, silt, and clay always adding up to 100%. Textural classes, shown in the USDA texture triangle (see Appendix), group soil textures that behave and manage similarly.

B-5-1. Rock Fragment Modifier

Modifications of texture classes are required whenever rock fragments > 2 mm occupy more than 15% of the soil volume. For this contest, the terms “gravelly, cobbly, stony, bouldery, channery, and flaggy” will be used (Table 6). For a mixture of sizes (e.g., both gravels and stones present), the largest size class is named. A smaller size class is named only if its quantity (%) exceeds 2 times the quantity (%) of a larger size class. The total rock fragment volume is used (i.e. sum of all the separate size classes) to determine which modifier goes with the fragment term (none, very, or extremely). For example, a horizon with 30% gravel and 14% stones (44% total fragments) would be named very gravelly (**GRV**), but only 20% gravel and 14% stones (34% total fragments) would be named stony (**ST**).

Table 6. Rock fragment modifier size and shape requirements and symbols

Size (Diameter)	Adjective	Symbol
Rounded, Subrounded, Angular, Irregular		
0.2 cm - 7.5 cm **7.6 cm - 25.0 cm** **25.1 cm - 60.0 cm** **> 60.0 cm**	Gravel Cobbly Stony Bouldery	GR CB ST BD
Flat		
0.2 cm - 15 cm **15.1 cm - 38.0 cm** **38.0 cm - 60 cm** **> 60 cm**	Channery Flaggy Stony Bouldery	CH FL ST BD

Additional requirements for rock fragment modifiers based upon percent of soil volume occupied are list in Table 7 below.

Table 7. Modifiers by percent rock fragment (> 2 mm) present by volume

Percent Rock by Volume	Rock Fragment Modifier
< 15%	No special term used with the soil texture class. Enter a dash or leave blank.
15 - 35%	Use “gravelly”, “cobbly”, “stony”, “bouldery”, “channery” or “flaggy” as a modifier of the texture term (e.g. gravelly loam or GR-L)
35 - 60%	Use “very (V) + size adjective” as a modifier of the texture term (e.g. very cobble fine sandy loam or CBV-FSL).
60 - 90%	Use “extremely (X) + size adjective” as a modifier of the texture term (e.g.. extremely stony clay loam or STX-CL)
> 90%	Use “coarse fragment noun” as the coarse fragment term (e.g. boulders or BD) and dash or leave blank the soil texture class and the % clay boxes.

B-5-2. Textural Class

Soil texture classes are those defined in the Soil Survey Manual (2017). Any deviation from the standard nomenclature will be considered incorrect (e.g., silty loam). Sandy loam, loamy sand, and sand should be further specified (see textures and abbreviations listed in Table 8) if the soil is dominated by a particular size of sand other than medium sand. Include very coarse sand with coarse sand. Contestants will determine soil texture classes by hand. The official judges will use field estimates along with laboratory data on selected samples to determine the soil texture class.

Table 8. Textural Classes and Abbreviations

Texture	Symbol	Texture	Symbol
Coarse sand	COS	Sandy Loam	SL
Sand	S	Loam	L
Fine Sand	FS	Sandy Clay Loam	SCL
Very Fine Sand	VFS	Silt Loam	SIL
Loamy Coarse Sand	LCOS	Silt	SI
Loamy Sand	LS	Silty Clay Loam	SICL
Loamy Fine Sand	LFS	Clay Loam	CL
Loamy Very Fine Sand	LVFS	Sandy Clay	SC
Coarse Sandy Loam	COSL	Silty Clay	SIC
Fine Sandy Loam	FSL	Clay	C
Very Fine Sandy Loam	VFSL		

B-5-3. Clay Percentage

Clay percentage estimates should be entered in the space provided. Answers within ± 4% of the official value will be given credit.

B-5-4. Sand Percentage

Sand percentage estimates should be entered in the space provided. Answers within ± 5% of the official value will be given credit.

B-6. Roots

Roots are important engineers of soil structure and pore connectivity, and their presence or absence is influenced by the type of vegetation and management at the soil surface as well as well as properties of the soil such as density, texture, and cementation. The abundance and size of roots in each horizon will be assessed using the following categories in Table 9 and Figure 2. If there are multiple root sizes present in the horizon, describe the size of the roots in greatest abundance. If they are of equal abundance describe the larger root size.

Table 9: Root Abundance and Descriptions

Root Abundance	Description
Many (M)	$\geq$5 per area*
Common (C)	1 to 5 per area
Few (F)	<1 per area
None	"-" or N

*Area assessed is 1 cm^2 for fine roots, 1 dm^2 for medium or coarse roots, see NRCS field book 2-71 or following page if printed on an 8.5x11 sheet.

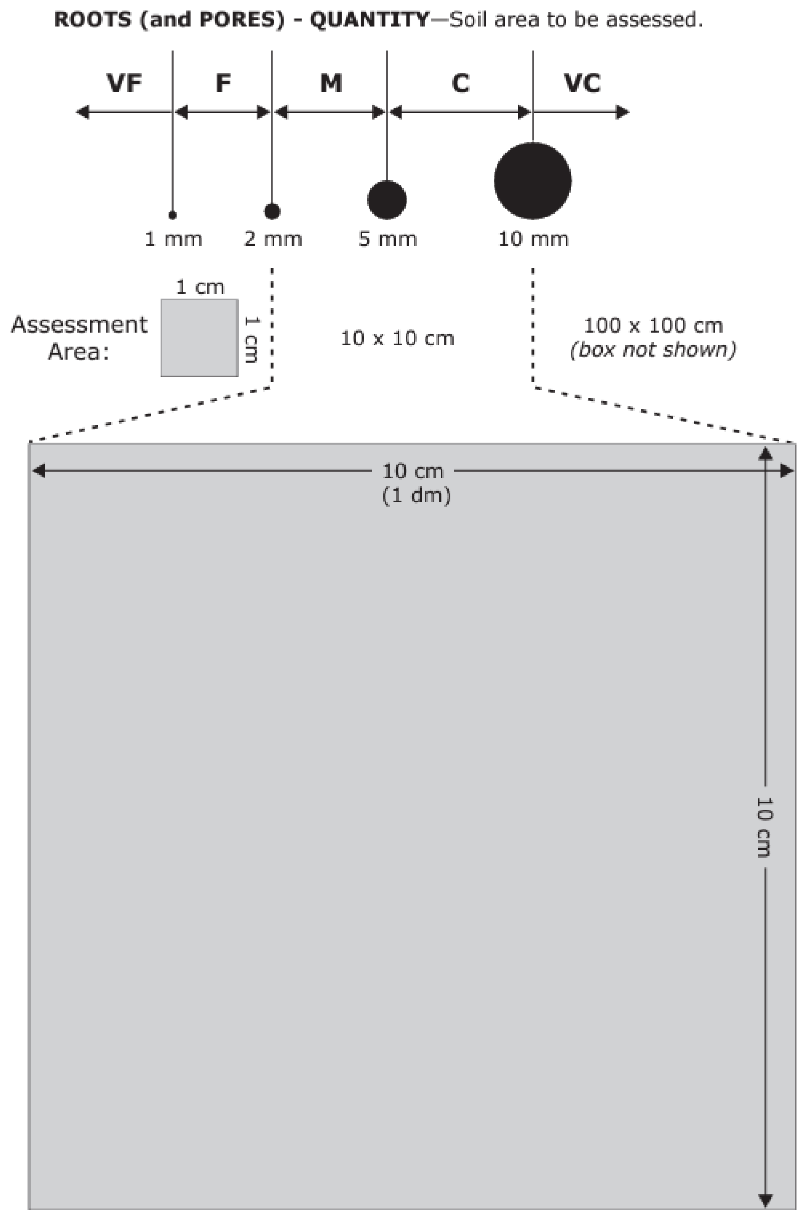


Figure 2. Area used to evaluate root sizes in soils (Schoeneberger et al. 2012).

B-7. Effervescence

Carbonates may be visible as whitish material in the field, or they may be disseminated and not visible. Dilute hydrochloric acid (10% or 1M HCl) is used to test for carbonates in the field, as calcium carbonate effervesces when treated with the HCl. To avoid problems with variability, presence or absence of carbonate as judged by visible effervescence will be determined, rather than classes of effervescence as given in the Soil Survey Manual. Team members should have their own acid bottles for this determination.

Presence: Yes (Y) – Effervescence of any degree in the matrix or in masses
Absence: No (N, -, or blank) – No effervescence present

B-8. Designations for Horizons and Layers

The number of horizons to be described and the total depth of soil to judge will be provided on an information card at each site. Narrow transition horizons (< 8 cm thick) should be regarded as a gradual boundary and the center used as the measuring point for the boundary depth. Horizons that can be thinner than 8 cm and should be described are A or E. These horizons must be at least 2 cm thick to be described.

Three kinds of symbols are used in various combinations to designate horizons and layers in Section B of the contest scorecard: capital letters, lower case letters, and Arabic numerals. Capital letters are used to designate master horizons (or in some cases, transition horizons). Lower case letters are used as suffixes to indicate specific characteristics of the master horizon and layers. Arabic numerals are used both as suffixes to indicate vertical subdivisions within a horizon or layer and as prefixes to indicate lithologic discontinuities.

<u>Prefix</u>: Lithologic discontinuities will be shown by the appropriate Arabic numeral(s). A dash or a blank will receive credit where there is no prefix on the master horizon.

<u>Master</u>: The appropriate master horizon (A, E, B, C), as well as any transitional horizons (e.g., BC) or combination horizons having dual properties of two master horizons (e.g., B/E), should be entered as needed. For lamellae, a "+" or "&" symbol should be used (e.g. E+B or E&B). If a horizon consists of anthropogenic material or material created by human activity, the carat symbol "^" should be placed at the beginning of the master horizon (e.g. ^A, ^C).

<u>Horizon Suffixes</u>: Enter the appropriate lower-case letter or letters, according to the definitions given in Chapter 18 of *Keys to Soil Taxonomy* (2014). For this contest you should be familiar with the following letter suffixes: b, g, k, p, t, u, w, y and z. The suffix "k" may be used with a C horizon. If used in combination, the suffixes must be written in the correct sequence to receive full credit. If a horizon suffix is not applicable, enter a dash or leave the space blank.

<u>Number:</u> Arabic numerals are used as suffixes to indicate vertical subdivisions within a horizon or layer. Sequential subhorizons having the same master horizon and suffix letter designations should be numbered to indicate a vertical sequence. For other horizons, enter a dash or leave the space blank.

<u>Primes</u>: Primes are used when the same designation is given to two or more horizons in a pedon, but where the horizons are separated by a different kind of horizon. The prime is used on the lower of the two horizons having identical letter designations and should be entered with the capital letter for the master horizon (e.g., Ap, E, Bt, E', B't, Btk, C).

C. Soil Hydrology and Profile Properties

C-1. Effective Soil Depth

The depth of soil to a restrictive layer, or effective soil depth, is the depth of soil that can be easily penetrated by plant roots. Soil materials must be loose enough so that roots do not experience severe physical resistance and yet fine enough to hold and transmit moisture. Horizons that provide physical impediments to rooting limit the effective depth of the soil. For this contest, materials considered restrictive to plant roots include: lithic and paralithic contacts. Soils that are clayey throughout, abrupt textural changes, and seasonal high water tables do not restrict the depth of rooting. For this contest, a natric horizon will not be considered as a root restrictive layer.

The depth to a restricting layer is measured from the soil surface (excluding O horizons). Besides its direct importance for plant growth, this property also relates to key factors such as water relationships and nutrient supplying capacity. The presence or absence of roots may be helpful in determining the effective soil depth, but it is not always the sole indicator. In many cases, the plants growing at the site may be shallow rooted or, conversely, a few roots may penetrate the restrictive layer, particularly along fractures or planes of weakness. At all sites, actual profile conditions should be considered and observed. A soil is considered very deep if no root restricting layers appear in the upper 150 cm (Table 10). If the profile is not visible to a depth of 150 cm, or if you are requested to describe a soil only to a shallower depth, then you may assume that the conditions present in the last horizon described extend to 150 cm.

Table 10. Effective Rooting Depth Classes

Depth Class	Depth to Restricting Layer
Very Deep	> 150 cm
Deep	100.1 – 150 cm
Moderately Deep	50.1 – 100 cm
Shallow	25.1 – 50 cm
Very Shallow	< 25 cm

C-2. Hydraulic Conductivity

In this contest, the vertical, saturated hydraulic conductivity of the surface horizon (Hydraulic Conductivity/ Surface Layer) and the most limiting horizon (Hydraulic Conductivity/Limiting Layer) within the depth specified to be described by the official judges will be estimated. "Limiting layer" refers to the horizon or layer with the slowest hydraulic conductivity. If lithic or paralithic contact occurs at or above the specified judging depth, the hydraulic conductivity for the limiting layer is very low. In some soils, the surface horizon is the limiting horizon with respect to saturated hydraulic conductivity. In this case, the surface hydraulic conductivity would be reported in two places on the scorecard. For a discussion of factors affecting hydraulic conductivity, refer to the *Field Book for Describing and Sampling Soils (2012)* and *Soil Survey Manual (1997).* Rock fragments will usually increase the saturated hydraulic conductivity.

Due to the difficulty in measuring and estimating hydraulic conductivity of the surface and the limiting layer, the contest scoring will be 5 points for the correct response and 3 points if the adjacent category (higher or lower) is selected.

Table 11. Hydraulic Conductivity Classes

Class	Hydraulic Conductivity	Description
Very High	> 100 µm/s (> 36.0 cm/hr)	Usually includes textures of coarse sand, sand, and loamy coarse sand. It also includes textures of loamy sand and sandy loam if they are especially "loose" because of high organic matter content (≥4% OC). Horizons containing large quantities of rock fragments with insufficient fines to fill many voids between the fragments are also in this class.
High	10 to 100 µm/s (3.7 to 36.0 cm/hr)	Usually includes textures of fine sand, very fine sand, loamy sand, loamy fine sand, loamy very fine sand, coarse sandy loam, sandy loam, and fine sandy loam.
Moderately High	1 to 10 µm/s (0.36 to 3.6 cm/hr)	Includes textures of very fine sandy loam, sandy clay loam, loam, silt loam, and silt.
Moderately Low	0.1 to 1 µm/s (0.36 to 3.6 cm/hr)	Includes textures of sandy clay, clay loam, silty clay loam. It also includes a texture of silt loam if it has low organic matter content (<2% OC) and high clay content (≥25%).
Low	0.01 to 0.1 µm/s (0.0036 to 0.036 cm/hr)	Usually includes textures of clay and silty clay that have moderate structure and a moderate organic matter content (≥2% OC) as well as low to moderate shrink-swell potential (mixed or kaolinitic mineralogy).
Very Low	< 0.01 µm/s (< 0.0036 cm/hr)	Usually includes textures of clay and silty clay with low organic matter content (<2% OC) and weak or massive structure or clay or silty clay textures with moderate to high shrink-swell potential (smectitic mineralogy). Mark very low on the scorecard if a lithic or paralithic contact occurs at or above the specified judging depth.

C-3. Surface Runoff

Surface runoff refers to the relative rate at which water is removed by flow over the ground surface. The rate and amount of runoff are determined by soil characteristics, management practices, climatic factors (e.g., rainfall intensity), vegetative cover, and topography. For this contest, we will use the six runoff classes described in the Soil Survey Manual (Soil Survey Division Staff, 1993). The following table, which illustrates the relationship between soils with various slopes and surface hydraulic conductivity (infiltration), will be used to determine the surface runoff class. The amount of vegetative cover should also be considered. **Where there is good vegetative cover or an O horizon at the surface, use the next higher (slower) surface runoff class. Vegetative cover should be judged between the slope stakes.** Examples of good vegetative cover include native prairie and pasture grasses, forest and turfgrass if dense and well maintained (no visible soil). Examples of poor vegetative cover include row crops (even if under no-till management) and patchy grass where the soil surface is visible. Students should mark "Negligible" for sites in topographic depressions with no surface runoff (i.e., sites subject to ponding).

Table 12. Surface Runoff Classes

Slope %	**Saturated Hydraulic Conductivity Class**					
	Very High	**High**	**Moderately High**	**Moderately Low**	**Low**	**Very Low**
< 2%	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible	Low	Medium	High
2 - <5%	Negligible	Very Low	Low	Medium	High	Very High
5 - <9%	Very Low	Low	Medium	High	Very High	Very High
9 - <18%	Very Low	Low	Medium	High	Very High	Very High
$\geq$ 18%	Low	Medium	High	Very High	Very High	Very High

Surface Runoff Classes: Negligible or Ponded
Very Low
Low
Medium
High
Very High

C-4. Available Water Holding Capacity

Water retention difference (WRD) refers to the soil water held between 0.033 MPa (field capacity) and 1.5 MPa tension (permanent wilting point), which approximates the range of available water for plants. WRD depends on the effective depth of rooting, the texture of the fine earth fraction (< 2 mm) (Table 13), and the content of rock fragments in the soil. The amount of available water stored in the soil is calculated for the top 150 cm of soil or to a root-limiting layer, whichever is shallower. Total WRD is calculated by summing the amount of water held in each horizon (or portion of a horizon if it extends below 150 cm). If a horizon or layer is restrictive (all except natric horizons) to roots, this and all horizons below should be excluded from WRD calculations. For natric horizons and all horizons below the natric horizons, the available water content is reduced by 50%. **If the depth that is designated for describing soil morphology is less than 150 cm,**

contestants should assume that the water retention properties of the last horizon extend to 150 cm or to the top of a lithic or paralithic contact if either of these is observed at a depth shallower than 150 cm.

Rock fragments are assumed to hold no water that is available for plant use. Therefore, if a soil contains rock fragments, the volume occupied by the rock fragments must be estimated, and the water retention difference corrected accordingly. For example, if a silt loam A horizon is 25 cm thick and contains coarse fragments which occupy 10% of this volume, the available water-holding capacity of that horizon would be 4.5 cm of water rather than 5.0 cm.

Once the water retention difference is calculated for the appropriate soil profile depth, the water retention class can be determined using Table 14. An example water retention difference calculation and classification for a theoretical soil profile can be found on the following page.

Table 13. Texture and Water Retention Difference Relationships

Texture Class or Material Type	cm water/cm soil
All sands, loamy coarse sand	0.05
Loamy sand, loamy fine sand, loamy very fine sand, coarse sandy loam	0.10
Sandy loam, fine sandy loam, sandy clay loam, sandy clay, silty clay, clay	0.15
Very fine sandy loam, loam, silt loam, silt, silty clay loam, clay loam	0.20

Table 14. Water Retention Difference Classes

Water Retention Difference Class	cm of available water
Very Low	< 7.5 cm of available water
Low	7.5 to <15 cm of available water
Medium	15.0 to <22.5 cm of available water
High	≥ 22.5 cm of available water

Example of calculation of water retention difference (WRD) for the following soil:

Horizon	Depth (cm)	Texture Class	Rock fragment %
A	20	SL	5
Bt1	60	CL	10
Bt2	80	L	10
2C	150	S	50

Calculation:

Horizon	Thickness		Texture WRD		Rock Frag Correction		cm H_2O/horizon(s)
A	20	x	0.15	x	0.95	=	2.9
Bt1/Bt2	60	x	0.20	x	0.90	=	10.8
2C	70	x	0.05	x	0.50	=	1.8
							Total: 15.5 cm WRD

The water retention class in this example is **MEDIUM (15.0 to 22.5 cm of available water)**.

C-5. Soil Wetness Class

Soil wetness is a reflection of the rate at which water is removed from the soil by both runoff and percolation. Position, slope, infiltration rate, surface runoff, hydraulic conductivity (permeability), and redoximorphic features are significant factors influencing the soil wetness class. The shallowest depth of either:

1) distinct or prominent chroma ≤ 2 and value ≥ 4 redox features (i.e. redox depletions) due to a seasonally high-water table or ponding.
2) color value and chroma of 2/1, 2.5/1 or 3/1 containing distinct or prominent redox concentrations and occurring contiguously above a horizon with a depleted and/or reduced matrix.

Table 15. Soil Wetness Classes

Class	Depth to Wetness features (from soil surface)
1	> 150 cm
2	100.1 – 150 cm
3	50.1 – 100 cm
4	25 – 50 cm
5	< 25 cm

D. Soil Classification

The reference used in this section is Keys to Soil Taxonomy, 12thEdition (Soil Survey Staff, 2014). For pictures and illustrations for soil classification, see the Illustrated Guide to Soil Taxonomy, v. 2 (Soil Survey Staff, 2015). Only the diagnostic horizons and features, orders, suborders, and great groups that exist or are plausible for mineral soils in the contest area are included on the scorecard. Flooding and ponding conditions will be given at each site. The weight percentage of organic C (OC), percentage base saturation (BS), electrical conductivity (EC), pH and weight percentage of total carbonate content ($CaCO_3$) will be provided for each horizon at each site. If none of these data are given, contestants should assume high base saturation, low or no salt content, low SAR, and <15% calcium carbonate equivalent. Please note, some of this information will be measured using standard laboratory methodologies and some will be estimated based upon prior data. For this contest, the soil moisture regime is udic unless the soil has aquic conditions, in which case the soil moisture regime is aquic.

The following discussion of specific diagnostic horizons and taxa includes abbreviated and summarized definitions. Complete definitions and classification keys are available in Keys to Soil Taxonomy, 12th Edition (Soil Survey Staff, 2014). **The simplified definitions and keys given in Section D will be used for classifying the soils in this contest.**

Each contest profile will be classified using Soil Taxonomy and a simplified set of criteria and options as explained herein and via additional supplements. Family classification will only identify textural class. Classification criteria for each Order, Suborder, and Great Group possible for this contest are considerably simplified. These simplified classification criteria are the official ones for this contest. Ambiguities will be clarified during discussion at the Region V Coaches meetings.

D-1. Epipedons

The following are the classification options and their definitions as used in this contest. Epipedon options are Mollic, Umbric, Ochric and None.

Epipedons potentially present in the contest area include:

1) **Mollic** - thick, dark colored horizon with high base status that contains soil structure.
   a. Color value is ≤ 3 moist and ≤ 5 dry. Chroma is ≤ 3 moist.
   b. OC ≥ 0.6% (1% OM).
   c. Base Saturation (BS) ≥ 50%.
   d. Thickness requirement ≥ 25 cm
      except when:
      i. ≥10 cm if underlain directly by R or Cr horizon and not sandy.
      ii. ≥18 cm and 1/3 of the thickness between the soil surface and the upper depth of pedogenic carbonates if pedogenic carbonates occur <75 cm below soil surface (e.g., if pedogenic carbonates occur at 60 cm, the thickness requirement = 20 cm) and not sandy.
      iii. ≥18 cm and 1/3 of the thickness between the soil surface and the lower depth of argillic, cambic or natric horizon and not sandy.
   e. Structure cannot be both massive and hard when dry.
   f. Does not contain rock structure or fine stratification in more than ½ of the volume.

The upper boundary of a Mollic epipedon must be within 25 cm of the soil surface. This can occur in the case where there has been significant upslope recent erosion. Mollic epipedons are allowed to be “split” by an albic E horizon.

2) **Umbric** - thick, dark colored horizon with low base status that contains soil structure. Requirements are the same as for mollic except base saturation is ≤ 50%

3) **Ochric** - an epipedon not classified as mollic or umbric.

4) **None** – use for the situation where a diagnostic subsurface horizon occurs at the soil surface where part of the soil profile has been physically removed by erosion or human activity.

D-2 Diagnostic subsurface horizons and features:

Indicate all diagnostic subsurface horizons and features that are present. If no diagnostic subsurface horizon or feature is present, contestants should mark "none" for full credit. Five points are awarded for each correct answer and five points subtracted for each incorrect answer, with a minimum of score of zero available for this section.

Diagnostic subsurface horizons form below the soil surface. Rarely, they can be exposed at the surface due to truncation. Typically, diagnostic subsurface horizons are B horizons but may include parts of A or E horizons. Indicate all diagnostic subsurface horizons and characteristics that are present. More than one may be present. If none is present, mark “none” for full credit. Remember that negative credit will be given for incorrect answers to discourage guessing (although a total score for one answer will never be less than zero). Possible diagnostic horizons or features include: Abrupt textural change, Albic, Aquic Conditions, Argillic, Calcic, Cambic, Lithic Contact, Lithologic Discontinuity, Paralithic Contact, Secondary Carbonates and None.

Diagnostic subsurface horizons or features potentially present in the contest area include:

1) **Abrupt textural change** – characterized by a considerable increase in illuviated clay content within a very short vertical distance (i.e. a clay increase from eluvial horizon to an argillic horizon).
    i. Doubles within 7.5 cm if clay content of epipedon is <20% (e.g., an increase from 4 to 8%)
    ii. Increase by 20% or more (absolute) within 7.5 cm (e.g., an increase from 24 to 44%)

2) **Albic** - an eluvial horizon in which clay and Fe have been removed to the extent that the color of the horizon is determined by the color of the primary sand and silt particles rather than by coatings on these particles. Has moist value and chroma of 4/1, 4/2, 5/1, 5/2, 6/1, 6/2, 7/1, 7/2, 6/3, or 7/3. To facilitate separating these horizons from gleyed B horizons and calcite-enriched B horizons in this contest, an Albic horizon must occur such that Mollic colors are present above and below it and the albic has platy structure. Minimum thickness 8 cm. (E, B/E, E/B)

3) **Argillic** - contains illuvial clay. Minimum thickness 8 cm. (Bt, Btk, Btg, etc.)
    i. Contains clay films.
    ii. Unless it is directly overlain by an Ap horizon, the argillic must contain a significant clay increase:

1. If eluvial horizon has <15% clay, must have at least a 3% absolute increase (e.g., from 10 to 13%).
2. If eluvial horizon has 15 - 40% clay, must increase by a ratio of 1.2 or more.
3. If eluvial horizon has >40% clay, must contain ≥8% more clay (e.g., from 42 to 50%).

4) **Calcic** - contains an accumulation of $CaCO_3$. Minimum thickness 15 cm. (Bk, Btk, Ck, etc.)
   i. Has a $CaCO_3$ equivalent ≥15% and contains ≥5% **more** $CaCO_3$ equivalent than the C horizon or
   ii. Has a CaCO3 equivalent ≥15% and contains ≥5% identifiable pedogenic $CaCO_3$ forms such as concretions, soft powdery forms, threads, pendants on pebbles, etc.

5) **Cambic** - has features representing genetic soil development (alteration of color, structure) without illuvial accumulations or extreme weathering and not enough pedogenic change to classify as one of the other diagnostic horizons. (Bw, Bg, Bk, etc.)
   i. >15 cm think
   ii. Texture that is VFS, LVFS, or finer.
   iii. Evidence of alteration
   iv. Contains soil structure
   v. If aquic conditions occur ≤ 50 cm (soil wetness class 4 or 5)
      1. Colors that do not change on exposure to air
      2. Gray colors for one of the following situations
         a. Value of 3 or less and chroma of 0 or
         b. Value of 4 or more and chroma of 1 or less
         c. Any value with chroma of 2 or less and redox concentrations
   vi. If aquic conditions **do not** occur ≤ 50 cm, one of the following:
      1. Stronger chroma, higher value, redder hue, or higher clay content than the underlying horizon or an overlying horizon.
      2. Removal of carbonates or gypsum.
   vii. Not part of an epipedon or another diagnostic subsurface horizon
   viii. Not part of an Ap horizon

6) **Lithic contact** - the contact between soil and a coherent underlying material that is impractical to dig with a spade. The underlying material cannot include diagnostic soil horizons. Usually, it is strongly cemented material like hard limestone or sandstone. (R)

7) **Lithologic discontinuity** - major changes in texture or mineralogy that represent differences in lithology. Often, it is change in parent material, but sometimes a lithological discontinuity can occur in layers of alluvium.

8) **Paralithic contact** - the contact between soil and paralithic materials that are weakly cemented (can dig with difficulty with a spade) with no cracks or the cracks are >10 cm apart. Usually, it is partially weathered or weakly consolidated bedrock such as sandstone, siltstone, shale, or mudstone. (Cr, Crk, Crkt, etc.)

9) **Secondary Carbonates** - visible calcium carbonate ($CaCO_3$) that has been precipitated in the soil. (Bk, Btk)

10) **Wetness Features** – pedogenic gray soil color that indicates periodic, but not necessarily continuous, wetness that create depletions or a depleted matrix. (depletions present, Bg, Cg, etc.)
    i. Depletions have chroma 2 or less (moist) and are more gray than the matrix, or
    ii. Depleted matrices are matrix colors with chromas of 2 or less and values of 4 or more caused by reducing conditions

11) **None** – no diagnostic subsurface horizon or feature.

D-3. Order, Suborder, Great Group

Classify the soil in the appropriate order, suborder, and great group according to *Keys to Soil Taxonomy, 12th Edition* (Soil Survey Staff, 2014). **The simplified definitions and keys given in Section D will be used for classifying the soils in this contest.**

Table 16. Soil order, suborder and great group options.

Order	Suborder	Great Group
Mollisol	Alboll	Argialboll
	Aquoll	Calciaquoll
		Argiaquoll
		Epiaquoll
		Endoaquoll
	Udoll	Calciudoll
		Argiudoll
		Hapludoll
Alfisol	Aqualf	Albaqualf
		Epiaqualf
		Endoaqualf
	Udalf	Hapludalf
Inceptisol	Aquept	Epiaquept
		Endoaquept
	Udept	Eutrudept
		Dystrudept
Entisol	Aquent	Psammaquent
		Fluvaquent
		Epiaquent
		Endoaquent
	Psamment	Quartzipsamment
		Udipsamment
	Fluvent	Udifluvent
	Orthent	Udorthent

The following classification keys follow a “fall-out first principle.”

1) **Mollisols** - mollic epipedon and ≥50% base saturation in the deepest horizon.
   a) **Albolls** – contain an argillic or natric horizon and an albic horizon directly below or within the mollic in the upper 100 cm; have redox concentrations and aquic conditions within 100 cm
      i) **Argialbolls** – have an argillic horizon
   b) **Aquolls** – aquic conditions
      i) **Calciaquolls** – have a calcic horizon within 40 cm and do not have an argillic horizon
      ii) **Argiaquolls** – have an argillic horizon
      iii) **Epiaquolls** - have episaturation (perched water table in upper 200 cm)
      iv) **Endoaquolls** - have endosaturation (saturated zone is continuous in upper 200 cm)
   c) **Udolls** – other Mollisols with an udic soil moisture regime
      i) **Calciudolls** – have a calcic horizon within 100 cm
      ii) **Argiudolls** – have an argillic horizon
      iii) **Hapludolls** – other Udolls

2) **Alfisols** - other soils with an argillic horizon and base saturation ≥35% in the deepest horizon.
   a) **Aqualfs** - redox concentrations or depletions within 40 cm of the soil surface and, in the upper 12.5 cm of the argillic horizon, colors with value 4 or more and chroma 2 or less due to periodic or continuous saturation with water. (aquic conditions)
      i) **Albaqualfs** – have an abrupt textural change between the ochric and argillic horizon.
      ii) **Epiaqualfs** - have a horizon with dominant colors of chroma 3 or greater below a horizon with color value of 4 or more and value of 2 or less. (saturation from top down)
      iii) **Endoaqualfs** - other Aqualfs with endosaturation (saturation from bottom up)
   b) **Udalfs** – other Alfisols with an udic soil moisture regime
      i) **Hapludalfs** - other Udalfs

3) **Inceptisols** - other soils with a cambic horizon within 100 cm of the soil surface
   a) **Aquepts** - have within 50 cm of the soil surface, or deeper than 50 cm if all overlying horizons have colors with a value and chroma of 3 or less, a horizon with color value 4 or more and chroma 2 or less due to periodic or continuous saturation with water. (aquic conditions)
      i) **Epiaquepts** - other Aquepts having a horizon with dominant colors of chroma 3 or greater below a horizon with color value of 4 or more and value of 2 or less. (saturation from top down)
      ii) **Endoquepts** - other Aquepts with endosaturation (saturation from bottom up)
   b) **Udepts** – other Inceptisols with an udic moisture regime
      i) **Eutrudepts** – free carbonates (any effervescence) and/or a base saturation of 60% or greater in any horizon between 25 and 75 cm. (high base saturation)
      ii) **Dystrudepts** – other Udepts

4) **Entisols** – other soils.
   a) **Aquents**- have within 50 cm of the soil surface, or deeper than 50 cm if all overlying horizons have colors with a value and chroma of 3 or less, a horizon with color value 4 or more and chroma 2 or less due to periodic or continuous saturation with water. (aquic conditions)
      i) **Psammaquent** - has a texture of LFS or coarser in all layers (including sandy loam lamellae) within the particle size control section
      ii) **Fluvaquents** - have an irregular decrease in organic carbon with depth or 0.2% or more organic carbon at a depth of 125 cm or more from the surface. (subject to flooding)
      iii) **Epiaquents –** have a horizon with dominant colors of chroma 3 or greater below a horizon with color value of 4 or more and value of 2 or less. (saturation from top down)
      iv) **Endoaquents** - other Aquents with endosaturation (saturation from the bottom up)
   b) **Psamments** - have 35% or less rock fragments and LFS or coarser texture throughout the particle size control

section. (sandy)

i) **Quartzipsamments –** >90% by wt avg quartz minerals in particle-size control section

ii) **Udipsamments** - other Psamments with an udic moisture regime

c) **Fluvents** - are at least 25 cm deep, have slope less than 25%, and have irregular decrease in organic carbon with depth or 0.2% or more organic carbon at a depth of 125 cm or more from the surface (subject to flooding and usually has an Ab horizon)

   i) **Udifluvents** – other Fluvents with an udic moisture regime

d) **Orthents** - other Entisols

   i) **Udorthents** – other Orthents with an udic moisture regime

D-4. Particle Size Control Section and Family Particle Size Class

Determine the family particle-size class control section for the soil; calculate the weighted percentage sand, silt, clay, and, if needed, rock fragment content in the control section; and determine the family particle-size class. For soils with contrasting particle-size classes, just mark that this is the case on the scorecard without specifying the class.

D-4-1. Depth of Particle-Size Control Section

Contestants should select the proper depth of the family particle-size control section based on the soil properties present in the judged profile from those listed below.

1. 0 cm to a root limiting layer (where the root limiting layer is less than 36 cm deep)
2. 25 to 100 cm
3. 25 cm to a root limiting layer (where the root limiting layer is between 36 and 100 cm)
4. Upper 50 cm of the argillic
5. Upper boundary of the argillic to 100 cm (contrasting particle size class)
6. All of the argillic where it is less than 50 cm thick

D-4-2. Family Particle-Size Class

Once the family particle-size class control section for the soil profile has been determined, contestants should calculate the weighted percentage sand, silt, clay, and, if needed, rock fragment content within that control section. The family particle-size class can then be determined using the guide listed below (also see textural triangles in Appendix). Contestants should know when to select only the three broad particle size classes, the skeletal classes, and when to use the seven more specific particle size classes. If two or more strongly contrasting particle-size classes are present within the control section, name the two most contrasting classes.

1. Sandy: texture is S or LS
2. Loamy: texture is LVFS, VFS, or finer with clay < 35%
   a. Coarse-loamy: ≥ 15% FS or coarser + < 18% clay
   b. Fine-loamy: ≥ 15% FS or coarser + 18-34% clay
   c. Coarse-silty: < 15% FS or coarser + < 18% clay
   d. Fine-silty: < 15% FS or coarser + 18-34% clay
3. Clayey: ≥ 35% clay
   a. Fine: 35- 59% clay
   b. Very-fine: ≥ 60% clay
4. Sandy-skeletal: ≥ 35% coarse fragments + sandy particle size class
5. Loamy-skeletal: ≥ 35% coarse fragments + loamy particle size class
6. Clayey-skeletal: ≥ 35% coarse fragments + clayey particle size class

7. Contrasting particle size classes - transition zone < 12.5 cm thick. For this contest, the presence of the following within the particle size control sections will be considered as strongly contrasting and “Contrasting (any)” should be marked for the family particle size class:
    a. Horizon(s) with <50% sand directly overlying horizon(s) with sand or loamy sand texture (any sand size except very fine)
    b. Horizon(s) with >35% clay directly overlying horizon(s) with <35% clay and 25% less clay (absolute) relative to the overlying horizon
    c. Horizon(s) with <18% clay directly overlying horizon(s) with >35% clay

NOTE: Subclasses of the loamy and clayey particle size classes will always be used unless a root limiting layer occurs within 50 cm.

E. Soil Interpretations

This section illustrates applications of soil information to land use and ecological site suitability. Soil interpretations involve the determination of the degree of limitation within each soil for a specified use. The most restrictive soil property determines the limitation rating. In cases where the base of the pit does not extend to the depth indicated in the following tables (i.e. 180 cm for some criteria), assume that the lowest horizon in the pit extends to the depth of interest.

Indicate the limitations category (Slight, Moderate or Severe) for each soil use below and list the reason number(s) that resulted in that ranking. If limitations are "Slight", mark a "-" for reason.

E-1. Septic Tank Absorption Fields

The following table is used for evaluating limitations for septic tank absorption fields. The soil between the depths of 60 cm and 180 cm should be considered in making septic tank ratings. If the profile is not visible to 180 cm, assume the last visible horizon continues to 180 cm.

Most limiting layer is defined as the one that would be most limiting for this use, so a loamy sand and clay loam within the profile would be limited (for septic) by the filtering capacity of the loamy sand and should be rated severe due to this property.

Table 17. Septic Tank Absorption Fields

Reason	Criteria	Limitations		
		Slight	**Moderate**	**Severe**
1	**Hydraulic Conductivity of the most limiting layer (60 – 180 cm)**	Moderately High, Moderately Low	---	Very High, High, Low, or Very Low
2	**Wetness Class**	1	2	3, 4, 5
3	**Average Rocks > 7.5 cm diameter (60 – 180 cm)**	< 15%	15 – 35%	> 35%
4	**Depth to Bedrock**	> 180 cm	100 – 180 cm	< 100 cm
5	**Slope**	< 9%	9 – 14%	> 14%
6	**Flooding/Ponding**	None	---	Any

E-2. Local Roads and Streets

The following table is used for evaluating soil limitations for local roads and streets. The soil between the depths of 25 cm and 100 cm should be considered for local roads and streets. If the profile is not visible to 100 cm, assume the last visible horizon continues to 100 cm.

Table 18. Local Roads and Streets

Reason	Criteria	Limitations		
		Slight	**Moderate**	**Severe**
1	Texture of the most limiting horizon (25 – 100 cm)	S, LS, SL	L, SCL	SI, SIL, SICL, SIC, CL, SC, C
2	Average Rocks > 7.5 cm diameter (60 – 180 cm)	< 25%	25 – 50%	> 50%
3	Wetness Class	1, 2	3, 4	5
4	Depth to Hard Bedrock (R)	> 100 cm	50 – 100 cm	< 50 cm
5	Depth to Soft Bedrock (Cr)	> 50 cm	< 50 cm	---
6	Slope	< 9%	9 – 14%	> 14%
7	Flooding/Ponding	None	Rare	Occasional or More

E-3. Dwellings with Basements

The following table is used for evaluating soil limitations for dwellings with basements. The soil between the depths of 25 cm and 150 cm should be considered for dwellings with basements.

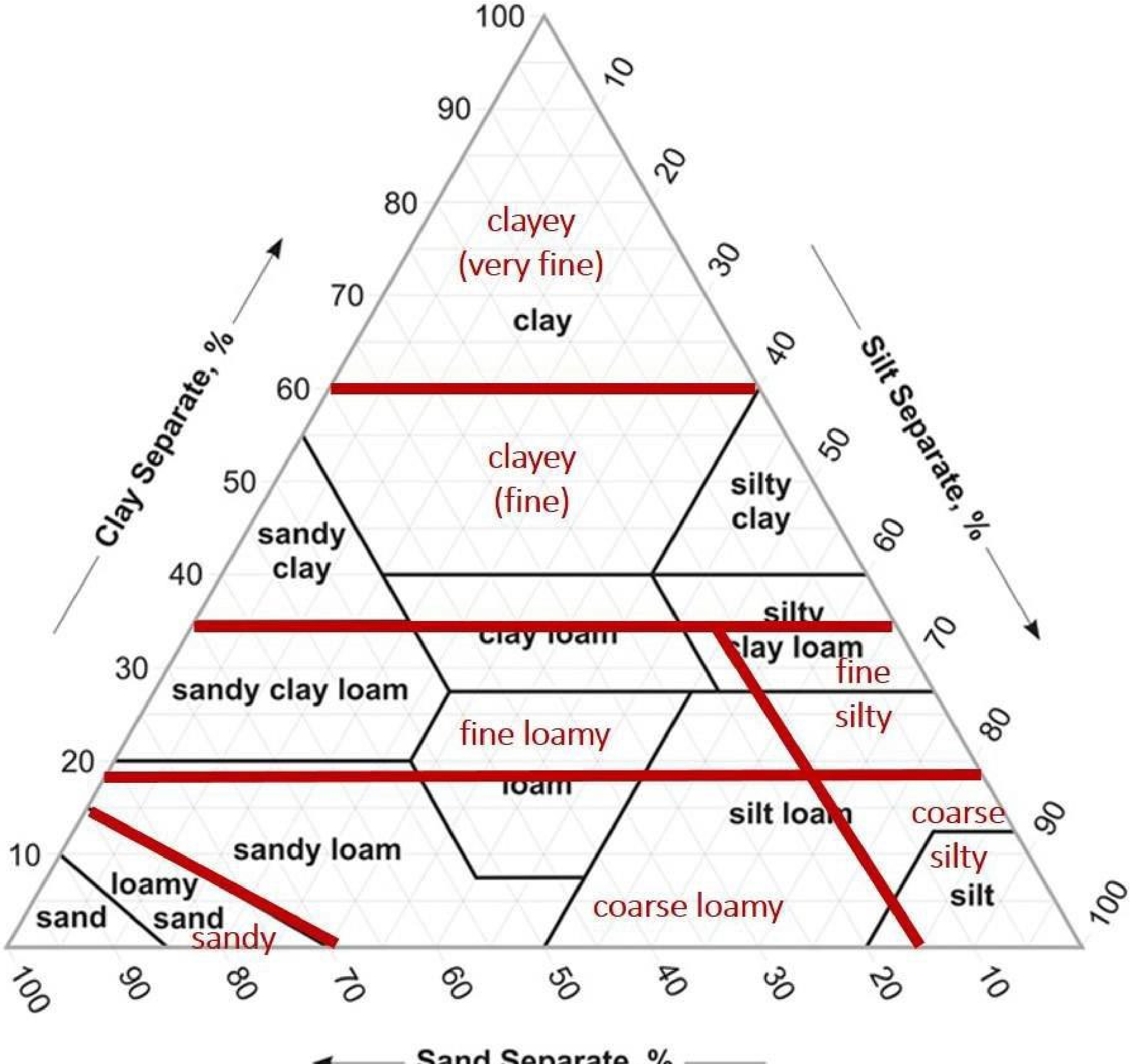
Table 19. Dwellings without Basements

Reason	Criteria	Limitations		
		Slight	**Moderate**	**Severe**
1	Texture of the most limiting horizon (25 – 100 cm)	S, LS, SL	≤ 35% clay	>35 clay
2	Average Rocks > 7.5 cm diameter (60 – 180 cm)	< 15%	15 – 35%	> 35%
3	Wetness Class	1, 2	3	4, 5
4	Depth to Hard Bedrock (R)	≥ 150 cm	150 – 100 cm	< 100 cm
5	Depth to Soft Bedrock (Cr)	> 100 cm	50-100 cm	< 50 cm
6	Slope	< 9%	9 – 14%	> 14%
7	Flooding/Ponding	None	N/A	Any flooding

Abbreviations and USDA Textural Triangle

Abbreviations are provided in Tables throughout this guidebook. A sheet of abbreviations will be given to contestants on the day of the contest.

Combined USDA Soil Textural Triangle (black) and Family Particle-Size Classes (red).



Site Information & Rotation

<u>Example of Information to be Posted at Each Judging Site</u>

SITE #

Describe 6 horizons between the surface shown by the top of the ruler and a depth of 150 cm.
The yellow scorecard will be used at this site. (Any additional instructions or data will be indicated here.)

Note: Identification of horizons, diagnostic horizons and characteristics, and taxa will primarily be based on morphology. If morphological criteria are met, assume lab-determined criteria are too, unless lab data are given. For example, if the soil meets the moist color, base saturation, thickness, lack of stratification, and organic carbon criteria for a mollic epipedon, it can be assumed that all other criteria for the mollic epipedon and Mollisols are met. Lab data will be provided.

<u>Site and Rotation Procedures</u>:

Each site will have its own color-marked scorecard. Each contestant will be given a packet at the beginning of the contest that has scorecards, a sheet of abbreviations, interpretation tables, and a texture triangle. Extra copies of the scorecard will be available at each site for emergencies. The information posted at each site will include scorecard color information. Rotation may be changed due to participant numbers or weather conditions.

<u>Individual Sites</u>:

An example of a full contestant number is as follows: 1AL-In. The “1” is the team number and the “A” is the contestant number. Each contestant ID number will contain either an “L” or an “R”. This tells whether the left or the right face is to be judged. Finally, there is an “-In” or an “-Out”. This designates whether the contestant starts in or out of the judging pit first at the first site. If a contestant starts in the judging pit at the first site, that contestant will start out of the judging pit at the second site, and vice versa.

Each contestant will be in the pit first one time and out of the pit first one time during the individual part of the contest. In addition, two team members of each team will describe the left face and two team members will describe the right face. Alternates will be assigned to even out contestant numbers at each site.

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Appendix

Region V and National Soil Judging Contest Dates and Locations
(Most information compiled by M.D. Ransom and O.W. Bidwell, Kansas State University).

Date	Region V Location	National Location	Region Host
1958	Manhattan, KS	---	---
1959	Brainerd, MN	---	---
1960-61	Lincoln, NE	Lexington, KY	2
1961-62	None	St. Paul, MN	5
1962-63	None	Lubbock, TX	4
1963-64	None	Madison, WI	3
1964-65	None	Raleigh, NC	2
1965-66	Ames, IA	Las Cruces, NM	6
1966-67	Manhattan, KS	Ithaca, NY	1
1967-68	St. Paul, MN	Manhattan, KS	5
1968-69	Lincoln, NE	Stillwater, OK	4
1969-70	Rolla, MO	Lansing, MI	3
1970-71	Ames, IA	Tucson, AZ	6
1971-72	Manhattan, KS	Blacksburg, VA	2
1972-73	St. Paul, MN	University Park, MD	1
1973-74	North Platte, NE	Boone, IA	5
1974-75	Fargo, ND	College Station, TX	4
1975-76	Columbia, MO	Urbana, IL	3
1976-77	Brookings, SD	Clemson, SC	2
1977-78	Manhattan, KS	Las Cruces, NM	6
1978-79	Ames, IA	Bozeman, MT	7
1979-80	Brainerd, MN	State College, PA	1
1980-81	Brookings, SD	Lincoln, NE	5
1981-82	Manhattan, KS	Fayetteville, AR	4

1982-83	Ames, IA	Columbus, OH	3
1983-84	Elba, MN	San Luis Obispo, CA	6
1984-85	Lincoln, NE	Knoxville, TN	2
1985-86	Lake Metigoshe, ND	Fort Collins, CO	7
1986-87	Lake of the Ozarks, MO	Ithaca, NY	1
1987-88	Rock Springs Ranch, KS	Near Brookings, SD	5
1988-89	Roaring River State Park, MO	Stephenville, TX	4
1989-90	Boone County, IA	West Lafayette, IN	3
1990-91	Long Lake Conservation Camp, MN	Murray, KY	2
1991-92	Aurora, NE	Davis, CA	6
1992-93	Brookings, SD	Corvallis, OR	7
1993-94	Rock Springs, KS	Near College Park, MD	1
1994–95	Poplar Bluff, MO	Lake of the Ozarks, MO	5
1995-96	Near Ames, IA	Stillwater, OK	4
1996-97	Camp Ihduhapi, Minnesota	Madison, WI	3
1997-98	Holt County, Nebraska	Athens, GA	2
1998-99	Brookings, SD	Tucson, AZ	6
1999-2000	Manhattan, KS	Moscow, ID	7
2000-2001	Mt. Vernon, MO	University Park, PA	1
2001-2002	Decorah, IA	Red Wing, MN	5
2002-2003	Lake Shetek, MN	College Station, TX	4
2003-2004	Columbia, MO	Normal, IL	3
2004-2005	Norfolk, NE	Auburn, AL	2
2005-2006	Sturgis, SD	San Luis Obispo, CA	6
2006-2007	Manhattan, KS	Logan, UT	7
2007-2008	Griswold, IA	West Greenwich, RI	1
2008-2009	Cloquet, MN	Springfield, MO	5
2009-2010	Columbia, MO	Lubbock, TX	4
2010-2011	North Platte, NE	Bend, OR	7
2011-2012	Pierre, SD	Morgantown, WV	2

2012-2013	Maryville, MO	Platteville, WI	3
2013-2014	Springfield, MO	Delaware Valley College, PA	1
2014-2015	Ames, IA	Monticello, AR	4
2015-2016	Grand Rapids, MN	Manhattan, KS	5
2016-2017	Lincoln, NE	DeKalb, IL	3
2017-2018	Redfield, SD	Martin, TN	2
2018-2019	Manhattan, KS	San Luis Obispo, CA	6
2019-2020	Grand Island, NE	Columbus, OH* *cancelled due to COVID-19	N/A
2020-2021	University of Missouri – Virtual* *virtual due to COVID-19	Virtual* *virtual due to COVID-19	N/A
2021-2022	Crookston, MN	Columbus, OH	1
2022-2023	Okoboji, IA	Oklahoma	4
2023-2024	Sturgis, SD	Ames, IA	5
2024-2025	Great Bend, KS	Stevens Point, WI	3
2025-2026	Omaha, NE	NC	2