SSSA President’s Message

Positioning SSSSA as the Source for All Things Soils and the Home for All Soils Professionals

The new year is under way, and it should prove to be an exciting and productive year for SSSA. Last year saw several positive changes within the Society, and along with the board of directors and headquarters staff, I hope to expand upon these. We have two new committees—SSSA Conference, and Membership and Society Identity—as well as a new division—Consulting Soil Scientists.

The SSSA Conference Committee is working to open opportunities for our members with small, focused meetings. In 2013, we will co-sponsor a conference on Nitrogen Use Efficiency, 11–14 Aug. 2013 in Kansas City, MO (co-sponsors and website info to be named later) and the North American Forest Soils Conference. In 2014, there will be two mini-conferences: Soil’s Role in Restoring Ecosystem Services, 6–10 Mar. 2014 in Sacramento, CA and Innovation in Onsite Wastewater, in March or April 2014 in Albuquerque, NM (co-sponsors and website info to be named later). The committee is also finalizing a procedure to solicit and select future conferences.

The Membership and Society Identity Committee is hard at work to position SSSA and soils in general to the forefront of earth science in the public eye. The committee’s first accomplishment will be a redesigned website to be unveiled later this year.

The new Consulting Soil Scientists Division continues to grow and helps connect research being done by our members to the practice of soil science. This year, SSSA will also offer the inaugural soils field camp designed for practicing soil scientists, 17–23 Aug. 2013 in Treehaven, WI. Our ideal is to keep strong ties to our agricultural roots as well as recognize the breadth of soil science.

Proposed Bylaw Changes

The most immediate question raised by our Society’s continued growth relates to the proposed changes to the bylaws that you have been asked to vote upon. These changes build on the recommendations of the Reorganization Task Force Report of 2012 (see the report at www.soils.org/reorganization). The proposed changes will strengthen our Society and represent an important leap forward for us. Internally, Society governance will be based on representation from four broad groups—Fundamental Soil Science, Agricultural Soils and Food Systems, Soil and Ecosystem Processes, and Education and Practicing Professionals. The reorganization will keep the board of directors at an efficient and effective number while ensuring members’ needs are represented on the board.

Rather than selecting members of the board of directors from specific divisions, the board will be based on the number of members within a given group. The divisions will remain the same but will be placed within one of the aforementioned groups. Part of the proposed bylaws change is a streamlined procedure to create new divisions. The Reorganization Task Force has recommended the creation of two new divisions—Urban and Anthropogenic Soils and Soil Education and Outreach. The division structure will principally be used in planning the Annual Meetings and will allow members to maintain their “home” within the Society. Living in dynamic times, it is important to be able to adapt to changes in our science by adding divisions as needed. The ability to quickly add a division with a common interest reflects on our active rather than sedentary nature.

Externally, the proposed new structure, particularly in the four main groups, is simple and conveys what we are to the broader community. Several of our sister societies (AGU, ASA, CSSA, ESA, and GSA) were asked to comment on the four groups, and the overall response was positive, indicating that the names are descriptive and resonate well with scientists in related areas. It is hoped that the simplicity of the groups will have broad appeal to early career scientists who now can see how they fit into our Society. I encourage all members to vote on these changes to the bylaws so that our Society truly represents all members effectively and responsibly.

Throughout this year, I will strive to be responsive to your needs as members. Please feel free to contact me at david_lindbo@ncsu.edu at any time. I also want to position SSSA as the source for all things related to soils as well as the Society of choice for all who work in soils. In order to accomplish this, our Society must embody a strong commitment to our role in agriculture as well as our growing involvement in environmental sciences, education (including K-12), science policy, and consulting. Together the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

1 See www.cnr.uidaho.edu/ftnc/nafsc/index.htm
2 See www.soils.org/education/soil-science-in-the-field

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