As I write this column, the azaleas are blooming, and the rhododendrons are about to open—it’s truly spring. By the time you read this, however, it will look and feel a lot more like summer. Your SSSA Board is meeting in early May to review progress and discuss the Strategic Plan updates. We thank all of you for your valuable input to your board representatives—it is greatly appreciated. We’ll have a summary of progress as it is available in later issues of CSA News magazine.

International Year of Soils

The International Year of Soils (IYS) theme for June is “Soils Support Recreation.” Whether we realize it or not, the time we spend out-of-doors has been linked to positive effects on our physical and mental health. Whether you are hiking a trail, playing a sport on natural turf, watching children screaming with pleasure on a playground, or spending time in one of our national, state, or local parks, you are doing it on soils; soils that need care and respect.

In fact, here in Washington, DC, we have been witnessing a transformation of the National Mall: the largely grassed central area that stretches from the Capitol to the Washington Monument to the Tidal Basin, which is a focal point for the annual Cherry Blossom Festival, and beyond to the Lincoln Memorial and Potomac River. The National Mall is the city’s and nation’s playground. Estimates are that more than 29 million visitors walk across these soils each year. That’s more than visit three of our most popular national parks—Yosemite, Grand Canyon, and Yellowstone—combined. On any one day, you can see soccer, touch football, Frisbee, picnics, festivals, and many other activities all happening throughout the Mall. It has been the center of massive demonstrations, inaugurations, and some of our nation’s most historical events.

All this well-intentioned use has taken its toll on the vegetation, drainage, and the infrastructure supporting the monuments, pools, and pools. Decades of deferred maintenance due to funding shortfalls has caused soil health to deteriorate to the extent that the turf has been reduced with significant stretches of bare ground. Decades of deferred maintenance due to funding shortfalls has caused soil health to deteriorate to the extent that the turf has been reduced with significant stretches of bare ground. Decades of deferred maintenance due to funding shortfalls has caused soil health to deteriorate to the extent that the turf has been reduced with significant stretches of bare ground. Decades of deferred maintenance due to funding shortfalls has caused soil health to deteriorate to the extent that the turf has been reduced with significant stretches of bare ground.

In the last few years, a combination of public money and private fundraising through the Trust for the National Mall jump-started a major, multi-year renovation that includes the restoration of the turfgrass, soils, and drainage on the Mall. The project is designed to both produce a healthy soil and a water-saving environment.

The first phase, closest to the Capitol building on the eastern side of the Mall, was completed in 2012, restoring the soils and turf between Third and Seventh Streets (Fig 1). A much needed irrigation system was installed, and large underground cisterns were placed beneath to collect and sustainably reuse stormwater (Fig 2). Damaged soils were removed, replaced, and re-engineered to be more resistant to soil compaction. Drought-resistant turf varieties were laid in large panels (Fig 3). Phase II began last fall by moving the entire operation from Seventh Street to Ninth Street (Fig 4).