Urban Land Evaluation and Site Assessment in Florida¹

G. W. Hurt, R. B. Brown, and P. E. Pilny²

State and county appropriations have helped bring us nearly to completion of Florida’s Accelerated Soil Survey. As mapping begins to wind down, levels of activity in a wide variety of basic soil services have increased (Brown, 1988; Schellentrager et al., 1988). For example:

1. Soil survey updates have become a regular part of the planning and routine in the state.
2. Area resource soil scientist positions continue to be created, with seven such positions currently filled and several more to be filled over the next few years.
3. Two soil scientists are assigned state-wide to full-time operation of ground-penetrating radar units for soil survey updates and interpretive work.
4. There is heavy involvement of soil scientists in soil survey digitization, through recompilation, quality control, advocacy of standardization, and advisory work in support of geographic information system efforts by numerous agencies around the state.
5. Soil scientists are active participants in educational work for various groups.
6. Soil scientists and conservationists have achieved some success in getting land evaluation and site assessment (LESA) into use in some parts of the state.

Much of the LESA work in Florida has had an agricultural orientation. As one example of an ongoing agricultural LESA program, Marion Soil Conservation District works up agricultural LESAs whenever a zoning change is requested for conversion from agricultural to nonagricultural uses, if the tract is 20 acres or larger in size. The LESA becomes part of the package of advisory information assembled by the local county planning department for the officials who must make a decision on the request. Marion District averages about five requests for such work-ups per month.³

Some counties, however, have found that their own needs are not for agricultural LESA, but for its converse: a means of rating tracts of land as to their suitability for urban development, i.e., an urban LESA. It is the purpose of this article to describe the urban LESA program that has evolved

¹This paper is a contribution from Florida’s Accelerated Soil Survey. Florida Agric. Exp. Stations Journal Ser. 9487.

²State soil scientist, USDA-SCS, 401 S.E. 1st Ave., Room 248, Gainesville, FL 32601; extension specialist in soils and land use, Soil Science Dep., Inst. of Food and Agric. Sci., Univ. of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611; and resource soil scientist, USDA-SCS, Route 1, Box 174, Bushnell, FL 33513.

³Information on Marion’s Ag LESA program may be obtained from Mr. Dick Vieira, district conservationist, USDA-SCS, c/o Marion Soil Conservation District, Fed. Bldg., Room 226, 207 NW Second Street, Ocala, FL 32670.