

VOLUNTEER SHOWCASE

October 2012, California

Volunteer Authors History Section in Soil Surveys

Robin Roberts, Earth Team Volunteer, has become an integral part of the soil surveys in the San Joaquin Valley of California. He is the author of outstanding "History and Development" sections in three different soil surveys:

Fresno County, California, Western Part
http://soils.usda.gov/survey/online_surveys/california/#fresno2006

Kern County, Northeastern Part, and Southeastern Part of Tulare County, California
http://soils.usda.gov/survey/online_surveys/california/#kern2007

Kern County, California, California, Southwest Part
http://soils.usda.gov/survey/online_surveys/california/#kern2009

In August, 2011 Robin Roberts earned a Doctorate in Learning and Technology from University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

Dr. Roberts' work has helped distinguish these projects as exceptional works that will stand the test of time. These "History and Development" sections have made three soil surveys a better product for users of soil surveys. He also took most of the photographs in the 2009 publication and was given credit on each as "Earth Team Volunteer." Dr. Roberts' has also published three books about Hanford, CA and Kings County through Arcadia Publishing in the "Images of America" series.

Kerry Arroues, author of these soil surveys and the Soil Survey Project Leader, witnessed first-hand the usefulness of Dr. Roberts' work. Arroues was able to concentrate on other areas of the soil survey because he knew Dr. Roberts' work had top-notch research and would help tie the history of the area back to the soils. These "roots" are important because they illustrate how fragile and important our interaction with the soil is. Arroues has heard from a number of people



Left to right, Ed Kreyenhagen (Rancher) works with Earl VanWie (Soil Conservation Technician-Hanford NRCS) and Robin Roberts (Earth Team Volunteer) near Garza Creek in Kings County in May 2012. The three are mapping the ranch area to provide Mr. Kreyenhagen with a guide for future range and conservation planning--helping him reach his conservation goals.

who have read Dr. Robert's sections in these published soil surveys and invariably they are impressed and say they now thought of soils in a new, living and fresh way.

Several challenges presented themselves, especially during the first year of Dr. Roberts' collaboration on NRCS Soil Surveys. One challenge revolved around how detailed to get while writing the section. Another challenge was to make sure the research and references were correct. Dr. Roberts has an extensive library that was a valuable tool as he wrote this section of the soil surveys. It was important to gain the focus and attention of readers of the soil survey to the importance of soil and the connection between humans and the soil they depend on.

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Dr. Roberts' work as part of published soil surveys has increased the public's interest in soil surveys by making the connection between something they often take for granted (soil) and their own history. These publications illustrate to our partners and the public that there is a strong connection between past interactions with the soil and history and that this relationship may define our future history. Dr. Roberts collaborated with people from other disciplines that included archaeology, geography, and of course soils.

Earth Team volunteers were honored every time the phrase "By Robin M. Roberts, NRCS Earth Team Volunteer" was mentioned. The beauty about publications is that they last a long time and the time spent as an Earth Team Volunteer is leveraged by the thousands of people who read the soil survey in the future and gain understanding about the unbreakable link between soil and history.

The following are excerpts from Dr. Roberts' latest work, published in 2009 on the Kern County, CA, Southwest Part Soil Survey. They illustrate why his work is exceptional.

"The history of human activity as it impacts the soil of the survey area revolves around the presence or absence of two liquids—oil and water. While oil and water do not chemically mix, the symbiotic relationship between the two in the survey area is important as a basis for understanding the history of land use in the southwest part of Kern County. Where one of these abounds, the other is not found. Where either occurs, humans are evident. Human interaction with oil or water defines human interaction with the soil."

"Weedpatch clay loam, 0 to 1 percent slopes (map unit 340), is named for this town. Both Weedpatch and Arvin gained national attention after the Arvin Federal Migratory Camp (better known as Sunset Labor Camp) was opened between Arvin and Weedpatch on December 12, 1935. Famed photographer Dorothea Lange created some of her most famous photographs of Dust Bowl migrants there during 1937 and 1938. A year later, John Steinbeck's Pulitzer award-winning novel, "The Grapes of Wrath," set largely in Weedpatch and Kern County and based on Steinbeck's experiences while visiting the Sunset camp, created a national controversy..."



The Earth Team is the volunteer component of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), a USDA agency. For more about NRCS and the Earth Team, visit www.usda.nrcs.gov.

If you are interested in volunteering, call (888) 526-3227 or visit your local NRCS office to learn about volunteer opportunities.