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November 1995

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Message from the President

The purpose of the PRSSS/SWCS Spring Workshop was to provide a forum to reflect upon the role of soil scientists and look at how we, belonging to different professional organizations, might consolidate our respective ground in environmental management. At best we reaffirmed just how illusive these subjects really are. To summarize fairly and correctly the outcome of the Workshop, organizers have waded through many thoughtfully prepared notes and comments. Beyond the debate itself, one could not help but be impressed by the participation and commitment of our members and the diversity and depth of their environmental work. Well established in many fields, it appears professionals with soils backgrounds can be optimistic about their future in environmentally related work, regardless of their professional affiliation.

Given the opportunity here, please bear with me as I ramble on about the environment and related issues. I suppose our predecessors thought their impact on the land to be so light and insignificant that there really was no need for such concepts as environmental management. In forestry, small frontier communities existed solely to extract timber from the bountiful 'resource' of trees, and certainly the resource was the trees. Soils and climate in which the trees grew were incidental and terrain only made logging easy or difficult. Environmental concerns were a non-issue, almost certainly they never brought into question the suitability of a site for harvesting or whether a logging practice was permissible. Similarly in mining and agriculture, impacts on the environment or wastes produced were of little concern. Along with the endless abundance of land, there seemed to be an endless capacity for clean air and flowing water to dilute or flush away by-products. Given the early isolation of most resource based activities in this part of the world, concerns over environmental management were basically ignored.

Well, 'it's payback time', to quote the wise words in a recent telephone ad. Any activity with an impact on the environment is now pretty well scrutinized by someone or some group, usually with a "special interest" or regulation to uphold, and frequently with considerable sanctimony. The problem facing us is whether people having radically different philosophies about environmental management will ever be able to communicate constructively to find mutually acceptable approaches to practical problems. If environmental sustainability is to be part of future workable practices in our land based industries, it will need to come from constructive criticism and verifiable "facts" about the consequences of our practices. These can only come through continued research and education, combined with hands on experience. Otherwise we can (cont'd next page)

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President's Message (continued)

only anticipate heightened cynicism and further opinions from various sources directed to all things soils related. Professional soil scientists as a select group, however, should be capable of ascending opinion and presenting educated arguments and scientifically valid information. Furthermore, belonging to professional organizations, they are bound ethically to halt the spread of misinformation and condemn irresponsible recommendations related to soils and the environment.

As environmental pressures build, and the public increasingly sees the need to conserve soil and water, soil scientists of all stripes will be asked some very difficult questions, to which clear and concise answers and recommendations will be expected. To many soils-related problems and issues we will not have the answers, or, have answers that people do not want to hear. Moreover, we are ethically bound to say just that. At such times professionalism comes into play and we benefit by belonging to our respective professional organizations. Codes of ethics, mentors and common experiences shared by other professionals help the soil scientist make appropriate decisions to what can be extremely sensitive, and expensive matters. That said, it will become increasingly important in the future for all soil scientists to keep their communication links open, regardless of the professional organization aligned. For as soils issues become more complicated and inter-

Synopsis of the PRSSS 1994 Annual General Meeting

The AGM of the PRSSS was held over lunch on Saturday, March 25, 1995, at the MacMillan Building of the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC. The theme of the day's workshop, "On Shifting Ground in Environmental Management", explored the changing roles and new challenges of soil scientists.

A theme of change was also reflected in the past year's activities of the PRSSS. A review of the 1994/95 year revealed our attempt to branch out beyond the confines of UBC (eg. the Fall Evening Session was held in Surrey), link up with other organizations (eg. the Workshop was co-hosted by the SWCS) and involve members (eg. the Who's Who in the PRSSS series in the newsletter). The future of the PRSSS also revealed changes on the horizon. Three of the four executive

related, not to mention contentious, honest solutions will require a broader base of information coming from a wider spectrum of soils expertise.

In summary, the Workshop revealed to our members the difficulty of sorting out which professional organization should do which soils work. Important as this issue might be, it still should never get in the way of individuals, from different soils professions, co-operating, sharing, collecting and refining knowledge about the soils environment. Regardless of our professional links, I think we all agree, further experience and scientifically based knowledge about soils is still desperately needed, no matter where it comes from. I think it is also worth reminding ourselves that threatened soil losses or degradation to the soil, and what these mean for the environment, are still far more important than worrying about which professional group does the work. If we lose sight of this, those "professional" soil scientists who are seen to be pushing only a self-serving view towards environmental management will simply find themselves on the long list of special interest groups, muddying up the water more than it already is.

Trevor Murrie
P.R.S.S.S. President

positions were filled by members who are not based at UBC, a big change from past years. We received 7 new memberships and there are plans to produce a membership directory. The PRSSS executive review and future plans were well received by the 40 members who attended.

The treasurer's report, which outlined the finances of the Society and B.C. Soil Science Workshop accounts, was approved. Finally, the new executive was elected and is as follows:

President: Trevor Murrie, Matric Soils Consultants
Vice-President: Aynslie Ogden, Department of Geography, Simon Fraser University
Treasurer: Donna Dean, Soilcon Laboratories
Secretary: To be announced

Soil Scientists - On Shifting Ground in Environmental Management

In a time of environmental challenges and multidisciplinary approaches, where are the soils professionals? This was the topic of discussion at the Annual BC Soil Science Workshop held at UBC in March of this year. The workshop, a joint effort of the PRSSS and SWCS - BC Chapter, hosted over 80 participants, numerous guest speakers and discussion groups. At the plenary session held at the end of the day, a consensus was reached among the workshop participants in the recognition of common threads throughout the day's activities.

1. Communication among the various professional organizations should be enhanced with respect to soil science and its cross-disciplinary nature should be emphasized.
2. This type of communication could lead to a protocol agreement for cooperation among professional organizations with respect to soil science.
3. Specifically, a brochure should be made available to employers that crosses professional disciplines and aims to identify specialists in soils.
4. Special permits and limited licenses should be considered to allow interdisciplinary access to employment.
5. The duties of professional organizations should be reiterated to fulfill their obligations to the public and the resource by accommodating soil scientists and their role in environmental resource management.

Proceedings from the 1995 workshop will be available soon and will include a statement prepared by members of the PRSSS and SWCS - BC Chapter executive. The proceedings will be forwarded to government agencies, professional organizations and industry leaders throughout the province.

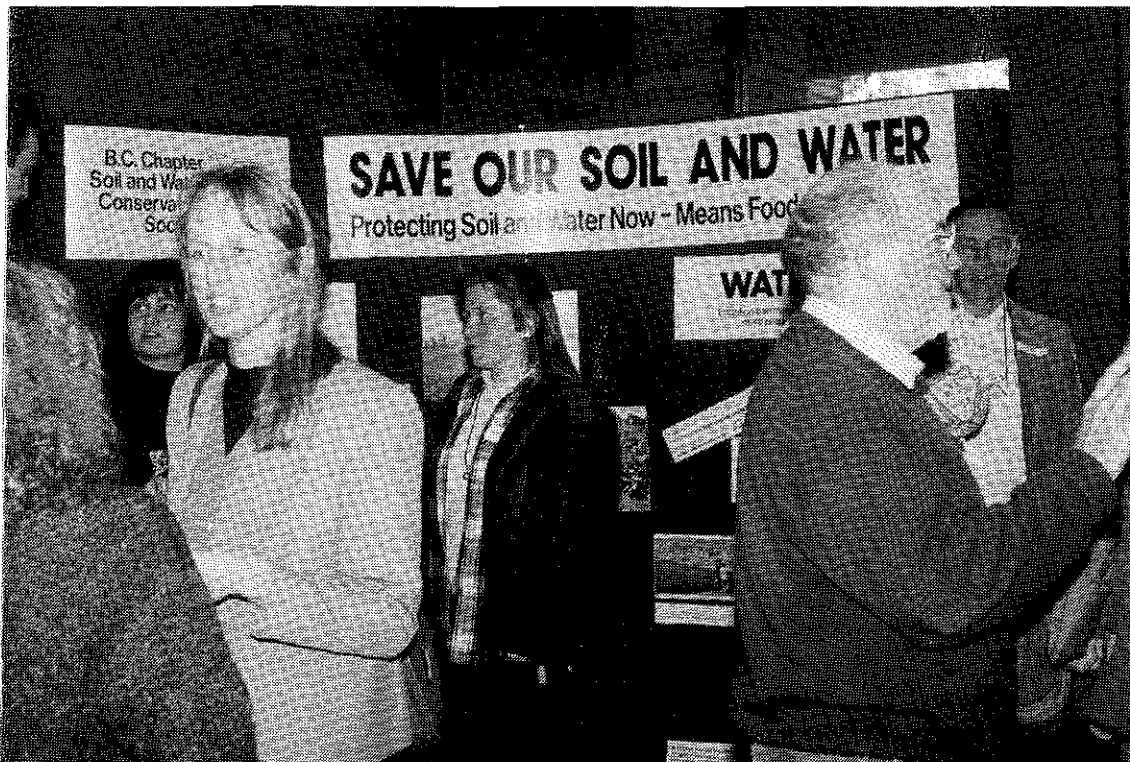
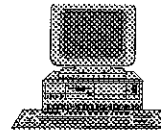


Photo above shows various participants at the B.C. Soil Science Workshop

PRSSS GOES ONLINE!!!!



The PRSSS and BC Chapter of the SWCS (Soil and Water Conservation Society) have jointly established an electronic mailing list that can be used as a forum for Soil Science Information. Membership and use of the list is available to anyone interested in Soil Science, whether or not they are members of either the PRSSS or the SWCS.

We can use this list to discuss anything pertinent to Soil Science in BC, including:

1. News about upcoming contracts,
2. Information on government policies,
3. Questions on and advice about lab or field procedures,
4. Opinions about current soil issues (e.g. Forest Practices Act),
5. Ideas for future PRSSS or SWCS activities,
6. Information on courses available at UBC and elsewhere,
7. Internet resources for Soil Scientists.

Membership in the list is free and available to anyone with an email address. You can sign up by sending email to Bill Denham (wttenham@unixg.ubc.ca) and indicating you want to be on the list. If you want to submit messages to the list, just send email to the address soil-discussion@unixg.ubc.ca - any message you send to this address will automatically go out to all members of the mailing list. Once you are on the mailing list, you will automatically receive in your email all messages which have been sent to the list.

If you have any questions or comments, please contact Bill Denham at the above email address or (604)224-7004.

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PLEASE INCLUDE ME IN THE PRSSS DIRECTORY _____

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Who's Who in the P.R.S.S.S.?

Member Profile: **Paul Sanborn, Ph.D. (UBC Soil Science), P.Ag.**
Region of work: Prince George Forest Region of BC
Employer: Ministry of Forests
Job responsibilities: Responsible for applied research, consulting and extension activities pertaining to forest soils.
Professional interests: Soil conservation, nutrient cycling and fertility management of forest soils.
Interesting reference: The Journal of Sustainable Forestry devoted two issues in 1994 to an interesting symposium on forest ecosystem health in the inland western U.S.
Recent Professional Experience:

Paul included two items of professional interest: the newly opened UNBC in Prince George and the impact of the Forest Practices Code on the soils resource.

The recent opening of UNBC provides resource professionals with a great opportunity to increase the amount of soils and ecological research activity in the central interior. Some very impressive new talent has been hired by UNBC, and several of the new faculty have interests that mesh nicely with existing research programs of the Ministry of Forests and the Canadian Forest Service. One example is Dr. Hughes Massicotte of UNBC; he will be examining the mycorrhizal aspects of interactions between lodgepole pine and Sitka alder, using a study site established by Rob Brockley (located at the MOF Kalamalka Research Station) and Paul in the Vanderhoof Forest District. Another collaborative project was carried out by Paul and Chuck Bulmer (of the Canadian Forest Service); they had joint reclamation research and demonstration projects at the Aleza Lake Research Forest.

Implementation of the Forest Practices Code will significantly increase the visibility of soil conservation issues in B.C. In the interior, the predominance of ground-based harvesting systems has often resulted in unacceptable levels of soil disturbance. With serious consequences looming for poor performance, it will be a major challenge for all concerned to raise the standard of harvesting and site preparation operations. Requirements in the Code for reclamation of damaged sites will further increase the demand for soils expertise in forestry.

Upcoming Events.....

October 25-27 1995 Environmental Management for Mining Conference
Delta Bessborough Hotel, Saskatoon

November 2, 1995 P.R.S.S.S. Fall Evening Session
"Soils Issues within the Forest Practices Code and the Farm
Practices Protection Act"
Simon Fraser University, Burnaby

November 5-9 1995 Society of Environmental Toxicology and Chemistry
Second SETAC World Congress
"Science, Politics and Common Sense"
Vancouver Trade and Convention Centre