



SOIL AND PLANT SCIENCE DIVISION

Technical Soil Services

Northeast Soil Survey Region

Grand Rapids, MI, Major Land Resource Area (MLRA) Soil Survey Office (SSO)

Soil Science Career Awareness for Students

Purpose

On February 26, Soil and Plant Science Division staff from the Grand Rapids Major Land Resource Area (MLRA) Soil Survey Office (SSO) provided an opportunity for students at Plymouth Christian School in Grand Rapids, MI, to learn about the field of soil science and related career pathways. Soil Scientist Sydney Lance and MLRA SSO Leader Matt Bromley participated in the event for approximately 110 students from grades 7 to 12 (fig. 1).



Figure 1.—Matt Bromley sits at the display table covered with soil publications, photographs, hands-on soil examples, and a laptop to show students how to use Web Soil Survey.



Background

In the words of the organizer, the purpose of the 4-hour event was to encourage students to “explore the many different careers available to them, to complete high school with a variety of courses, and to seek further education where appropriate.” The cluster of careers included agriculture, finance, science, and services. This marked the third time in the last 8 years that event organizers have asked staff from the Grand Rapids office to represent career opportunities in the agriculture and natural resources fields.

Key Outcomes

Students received a brief background on soil science and the importance of understanding the ground beneath their feet. Discussions included an overview of the types of soil properties we describe, why they are important, and how interpretations based on that information help inform land use decisions. This led to conversations about the variety of career options in soil science, qualifications, education requirements, and what the staff enjoy most about their jobs. Sydney Lance’s stories of avoiding grizzly bears while on detail in Alaska elicited the strongest reactions of the day. Opportunities like this are a good reminder of the importance of continuing to educate not just those who are specifically interested in our field but EVERYONE about the value in understanding soils and other natural resources.