



SOIL AND PLANT SCIENCE DIVISION

Technical Soil Services

Northeast Soil Survey Region

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

Careers in Soil and Ecology

Purpose

On March 13, NRCS staff participated in a career conversation at Grand Valley State University (GVSU) in Allendale, MI, to teach students about the Soil and Plant Science Division (SPSD) and encourage the pursuit of careers in the natural resource profession.

Background

Todd Aschenbach, GVSU Professor of Natural Resources and Environmental Management, invited NRCS staff from the Grand Rapids MLRA SSO as well as the NRCS Michigan Area 3 Office as guest lecturers for an Introduction to Natural Resources Management class. MLRA SSO Leader Matt Bromley, Northeast Ecological Data Quality Specialist Greg Schmidt, MLRA Soil Scientist Sydney Lance, and Area Resource Soil Scientist Erin Segar presented to approximately 35 students (fig. 1). NRCS staff shared information about NRCS and SPSP history, conservation programs, education and career paths, SPSP project types and career advice for students planning to enter the natural resources field upon graduation.

Prior to class, the students generated questions based on the staff member biographies ranging from professional advice, soil degradation, GIS technologies, and more. Following the presentation, students asked additional questions to learn more about future career paths within soils and ecology. Students also wanted to know more about the process of soil mapping, examples of unhealthy soils, challenges of working in the field, collaboration with other natural resource professionals, and wetland restoration.



Figure 1.—Erin Segar, Matt Bromley, and Greg Schmidt presenting to the Introduction to Natural Resources Management class.

Key Outcomes

Through this career presentation, the Grand Rapids MLRA SSO staff reached students who are interested in the natural resource profession. The goal of this presentation was to motivate GVSU students to pursue careers in the natural sciences by emphasizing the importance of understanding soils and ecology while offering firsthand experiences in the field. The Grand Rapids MLRA SSO staff look forward to additional collaboration with GVSU in the future.