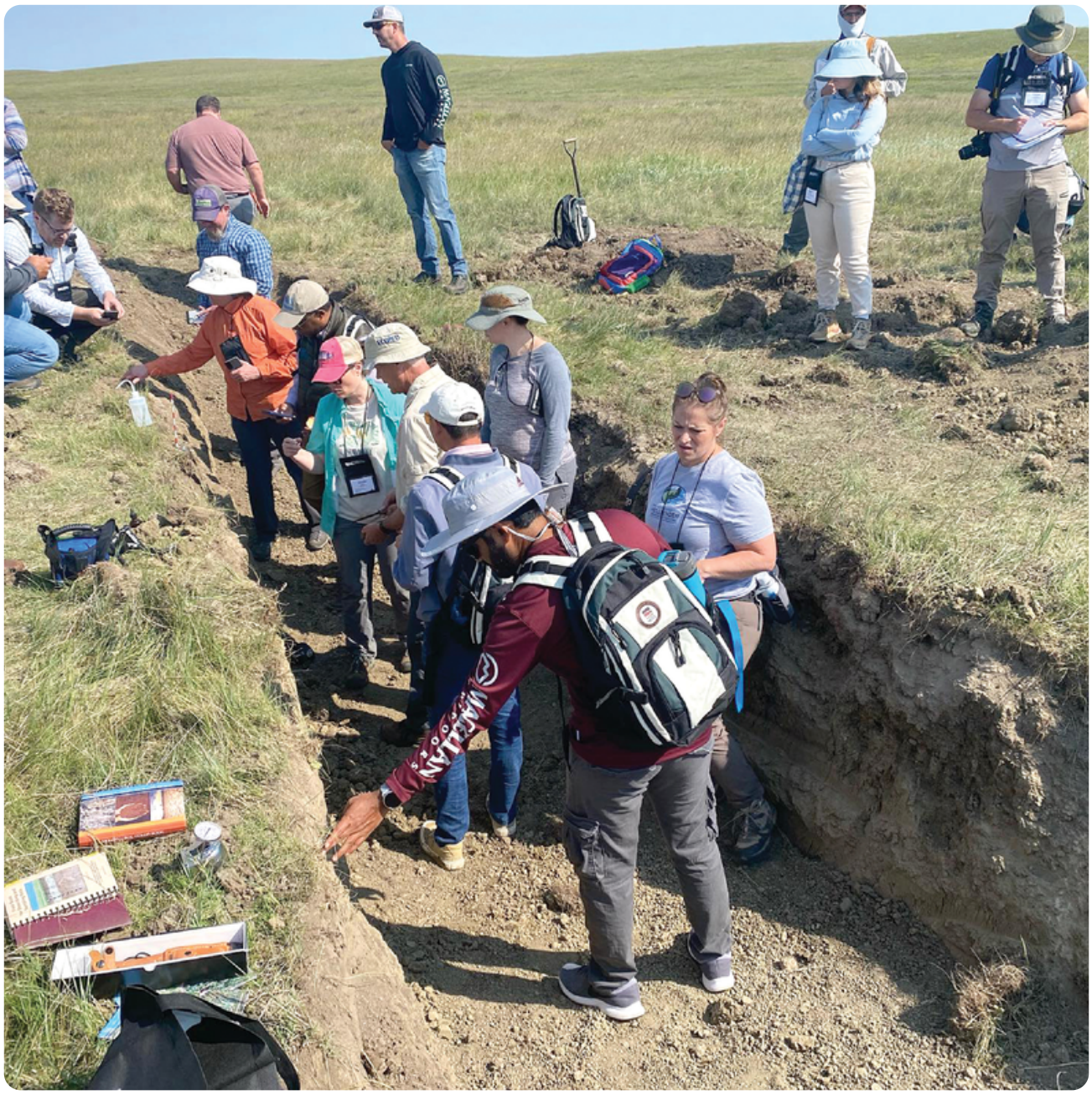
Science Societies

SOILS Are AWESOME!

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November 30, 2023



Scenes from 2023 National Cooperative Soil Survey Conference in in Bismarck, ND. Source: Instagram/National Cooperative Soil Survey (@ncss1899).

This summer, I was invigorated as I met with people who are passionate about soil science. In mid-July, I attended the National Cooperative Soil Survey Conference in Bismarck, ND. The planning committee along with North Dakota USDA-NRCS and North Dakota State University staff did an outstanding job in developing the program and field trips. I have driven though North Dakota in the past and stopped to see the sights in Theodore Roosevelt National Park and the Badlands. However, those landscapes came alive and became more meaningful when experienced with other soil scientists. Beyond the breathtaking views, I learned that all soil scientists, regardless of SSSA membership status, share the same concerns about soil, sustainability, and the pipeline of future soil scientists.

In early August, I spent a day with the Pennsylvania Association of Professional Soil Scientists. I reconnected with former colleagues and met new ones. Learning about the various types of work practicing professionals do is fun: From on-site waste disposal to green energy production and from resource conservation to food production! I always walk away with a renewed sense of the impact that soil has on human and planetary health; and the importance of soil scientists.

The SSSA Board of Directors had a strategic planning meeting in late July. (You'll hear more about that in the coming months.) We had great discussions reflecting on who we are and what we want to be. There was one point where we were stumbling over how to adequately verbalize the complexities, nuances, and simple beauty of soil as a natural body, fundamental for life. We were well into the C horizon of a deep, well-developed Mollisol when we needed to be standing on the soil surface, surveying the landscape. I suggested that we needed to simply say SOILS are AWESOME!

Consider the meaning of awesome. While informally when someone says something is awesome, they are saying it is excellent. And soil is excellent, but what if we dig deeper? Merriam-Webster's online dictionary defines awesome as inspiring awe; and awe is defined as an emotion variously combining dread, veneration, and wonder that is inspired by authority or by the sacred or sublime. Truly, if the interweaving of biological, chemical, and physical processes with climate, organisms, relief, parent material, and time is not awesome, nothing is. I left the strategic planning meeting energized and feeling positive about SSSA's future.

SOILS are AWESOME! Don't be afraid to say it and then explain why soil scientists are the key to sustaining life.

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