Science Societies

Soil riddles: July 2026

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Think you know soils? Test your knowledge in our “Soil Riddles” series.

> If you are the first to guess the soil series name and its geographical location correctly, we'll publish your name along with the answer in an upcoming issue.

Amazing soils are all around us. We see some quite often, while others only on special occasions or during a once in a lifetime trip. My wife, daughter, and I love to travel and have had the opportunity to visit some bizarrely interesting soils. My wife and I are both soil scientists and know very well how excited soil scientists get when trying to identify a soil from a photo or even just a partial core. In that spirit, here is a riddle (or two) for you!

Each month, I will share a new riddle in *CSA News*. If you are the first to guess the correct **soil series name** and its **geographical location**, I will publish your name along with the answer in an upcoming issue. Email your answers to me at adaigh2@UNL.edu (send message) with the subject line "*Soil Riddles July 2026.*"

Good luck and have fun!

Soil Riddle 1

The river slowed and dropped silt load,

Layer upon layer where floodwaters flowed.

My Ap is dark, but thin atop the rest,

Then stratified C shows alluvial layers best.

Below the banding, colors darken once more,

Ab1, Ab2, Ab3, a buried prairie floor.

Black silty clay loam, prismatic and strong,

An ancient mollic surface buried all along.

Somewhat poorly drained, I sit a bit higher,

While my darker cousin below is much wetter in the mire.

My taxonomy says Fluvaquent, Mollic in name,

For that buried dark horizon earns my claim.

Fine-silty texture, superactive and mixed,

Nonacid reaction where the chemistry is fixed.

Big bluestem and switchgrass once waved tall,

Where bison roamed before the pioneer's call.

Now prairie is restored where I reside,

In a refuge named for a statesman's pride.

What is my series name, and where do I lie?

Soil Riddle 2

Alluvium built me deep on the floodplain floor,

Black horizon stacked, then more and more.

My Ap gives way to A1, A2, A3 below,

A mollic epipedon, thick and slow to go.

Ninety centimeters deep or more I run,

Cumulic darkness, never seeing sun.

Neutral colors dominate, N 2.5 in hue,

Silty clay loam textures all the way through.

BA transitions where the structure shifts,

Then Bg and BCg where the water lifts.

Prismatic parting to subangular blocks,

Gray colors deepen where saturation locks.

Poorly drained, I sit in the lowest ground,

My cousin from Riddle 1 sits higher all around.

Together we form a catena on this restored prairie land,

Side by side in the bottoms, just as nature planned.

Endoaquoll I am, Cumulic and deep,

Where bluejoint and sedges their wetland vigil keep.

Fine-silty, mixed, superactive, mesic my class,

Across the prairie heartland, I amass.

My name hints at a place, simple and spare,

A short word for the bottoms where floodwaters share.

Look to Riddle 1 to find where we both reside,

Two soils, one catena, side by side.

What is my series name?

Last month's winners

The answer to last month's (June 2026) riddle was "The Lonestar Soil Series on the western flank of Mount St. Helens." Congratulations to Becky Young, Rodney Simpson, and John E. Stranzl, Jr.

Becky Young, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor of Practice at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL), Department of Agronomy and Horticulture. She leads the instruction for the introductory soil science classes, co-coaches the UNL soil judging team, and co-leads study abroad programs focused on physical geography and sustainability (Iceland), tropical agroecology (Costa Rica), and conservation agriculture and natural resources (Rwanda).

Rodney Simpson, Ph.D. and CPSS, is a manager at EcoCore, which is a University Core Facility within the Natural Resource Ecology Laboratory at Colorado State University (CSU). EcoCore provides analytical, training, and educational services in ecosystem and earth science research to support faculty, students, and researchers at CSU, federal agencies, and other institutions.

John E. Stranzl, Jr. is our first repeat winner! You can learn more about John in last month's article.

Both Becky and John also correctly answered the "riddle within a riddle." When asked who the neighbor is in this line from last month's riddle, "*While my neighbor named for shadows held the eruption's terrain*," they both gave the right answer: "Obscurity Soil Series."





Becky Young, Rodney Simpson, and John E. Stranzl, Jr.

Email answer(s)

More soil riddles

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