Science Societies

Soil riddles: August 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 August 2026.*"

Good luck and have fun!

Soil Riddle 1

Old silty alluvium settled on this basin floor,

Mixed with loess above limestone's ancient core.

My Ap is grayish brown with iron's orange stain,

Then BE and Bw horizons mark the upper domain.

But then a glossic feature, E/B tongues appear,

Light gray silt invading where the colors clear.

Below, the Btx hardens, prismatic and firm,

A fragipan develops where roots cannot squirm.

Very coarse prisms part to angular blocks,

Brittle in seventy-five percent, water flow it locks.

Silt coatings line the seams between each face,

While manganese concretions leave their dark trace.

Somewhat poorly drained on terraces and flats,

Where clover hay grows thick and pasture feeds in fact.

Aquic Fraglossudalf, siliceous and fine,

In a basin where country music's city does shine.

A small inclusion neighbor shares my ground,

Poorly drained without the pan that I have found.

Look to Riddle 2 to learn my companion's name,

Just south of the city that anchors country fame.

What is my series name?

Soil Riddle 2

Alluvium built me silty on terraces so flat,

In depressions and drainageways, that's where I'm at.

My Ap is grayish brown, silt loam and weak,

Then AB transitions where the structures speak.

Below, my Btg horizons turn dominantly gray,

Silty clay loam textures where the clays hold sway.

Mottles of yellowish brown mark where iron oxidized,

But chroma 1 or 2 dominates where water lies.

No fragipan binds me, no brittle layer below,

Just argillic horizons where the clay films grow.

My Cg turns to silty clay, massive and firm,

Where water oak and willow keep their wetland term.

Typic Epiaqualf, fine-silty and mixed,

Poorly drained on positions where the water is fixed.

My cousin from Riddle 1 surrounds me all around,

I occur as small inclusions on this basin ground.

Together in a basin where limestone underlies,

South of a famous city beneath musical skies.

What is my series name?

Last month's winners

The answer to last month’s (July 2026) riddle was “The Ackmore and Colo Soil Series within Iowa's Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge." Congratulations to Becky

Young (repeat winner) and Lucas Nave.

You can learn more about **Becky Young** in last month's article. **Lucas Nave** is Research Associate Professor at the Northern Institute of Applied Climate Science at Michigan Technological University. H teaches and conducts research on forest ecology, with an emphasis on forest soils.




Becky Young (left) and Lucas Nave.

Email answer(s)

More soil riddles

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