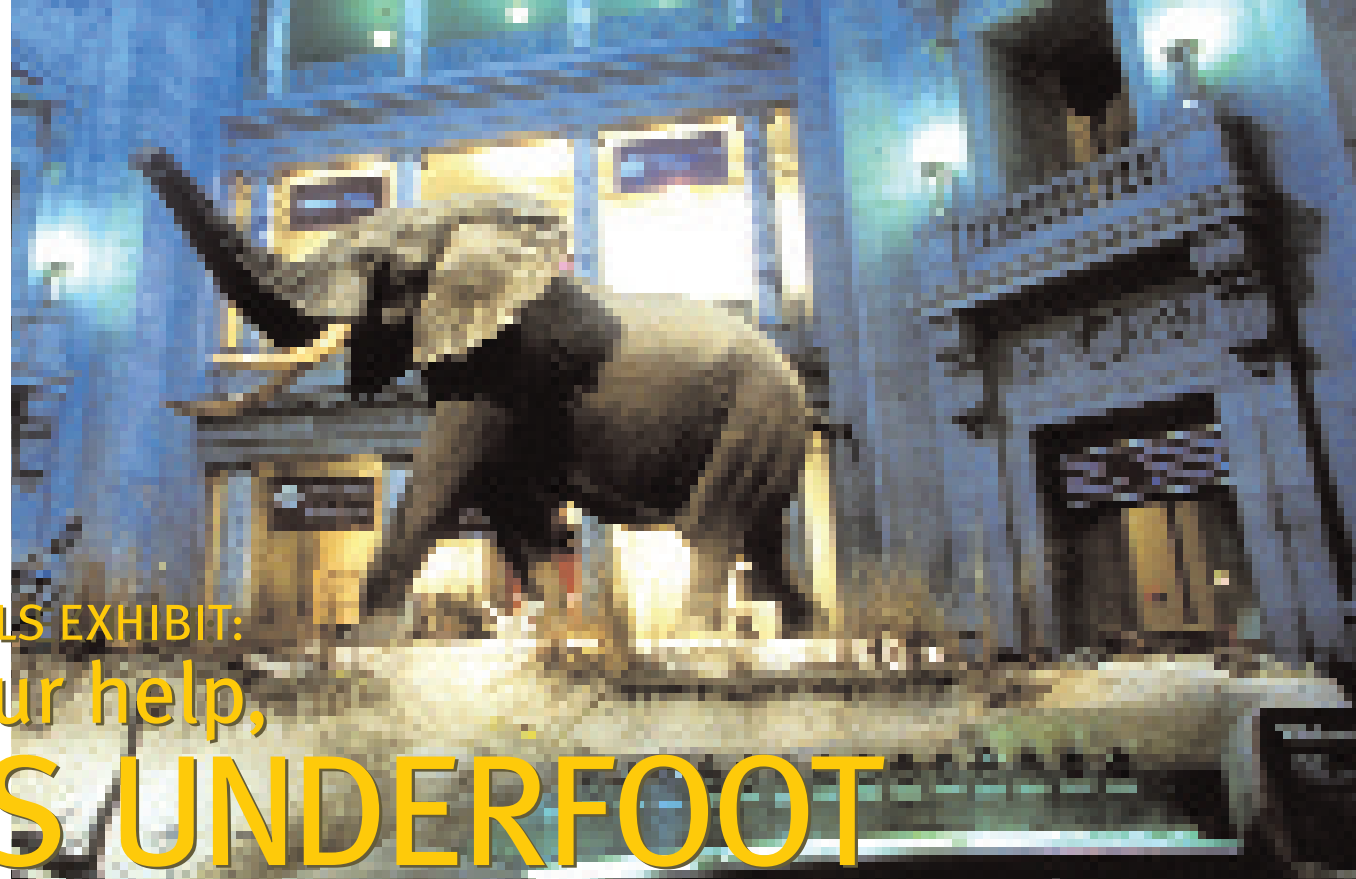


By Paul Kamps



SMITHSONIAN SOILS EXHIBIT: With your help, WORLDS UNDERFOOT will open in 2008

Pictured above,
The elephant statue located in the lobby of
the National Museum of Natural History.

The Smithsonian Institution, the Soil Science Society of America (SSSA), and others are planning a 5,000 square foot soil exhibit at the National Museum of Natural History in Washington, D.C. The projected opening for the exhibit, tentatively titled, "Soils: Worlds Underfoot," is 2008. The exhibit, which will occupy one hall of the museum and be displayed for 1.5 years, will feature state soil monoliths and interactive components. A separate traveling exhibit will reach hundreds of museums, schools, and libraries with soil education kits, web based activities, curriculum, and career information.

The purpose for the exhibit is to have visitors 1) understand and appreciate the myriad ways soil is essential to our lives, 2) understand that healthy soils are linked to human health, economic strength, environmental health, and food security; and 3) understand the human impacts on soil. (Please see the related sidebar on the five take-home messages of the exhibit.)

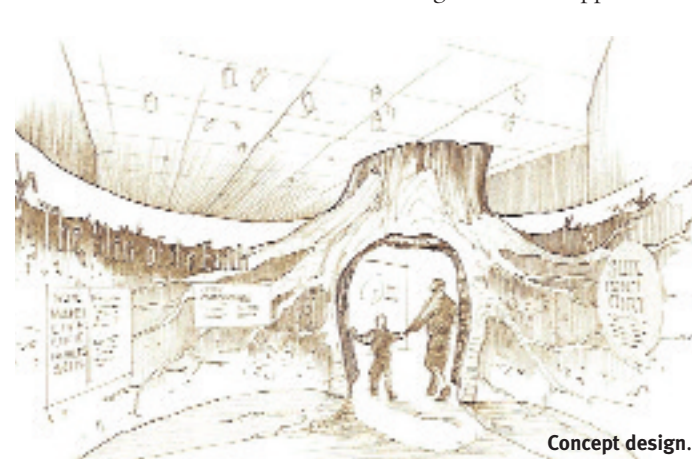
A core feature of the exhibit will be a longterm display of 53 state soil monoliths—one from each state and the three territories. The monoliths will showcase the amazing variety and aesthetic appeal of soils across the country with their myriad of colors, textures, and structures. USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has loaned the monoliths to the Smithsonian for use in the exhibit.

The other sections of the exhibit will be a temporary, interactive component featuring exhibit panels, interactive games, videos, activities, experiments, artifacts, and educational displays to demonstrate to visitors the vital link between soil and the health

of mankind, the environment and our planet. Concept design work has been completed, and building and installation is planned to begin in 2007.

The Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History is the most visited natural history museum in the world, attracting more than six million visitors each year with almost 20 percent of those coming from outside the United States. The exhibit will be part of the museum's Forces of Change earth system science program. The Forces of Change exhibit is designed to advance public understanding of how the Earth functions as a vibrant, mutually supporting system.

The greatest challenge in undertaking the Smithsonian "Worlds Underfoot" exhibit is in raising sufficient support. The



Concept design.

planning committee's strategy to meet this challenge is to raise the funds up front, before the work to develop specific displays begins. They have the backing of some essential and powerful supporters, but need additional support. Their goal is to raise \$4 million to create an interactive exhibit that will capture the imagination of the public and inspire a new era of appreciation for our precious soil resources.

More than \$800,000 has been raised towards the \$4 million goal, with support from many SWCS chapters and members, individuals and corporations, U.S. Department of the Interior's Bureau of Land Management, and the following USDA agencies: NRCS, Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service, Agricultural Research Service, the Forest Service, and Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service.

It is hoped that the Smithsonian Soils Exhibit will spur greater awareness of the importance of soils in our lives and enhanced attention to soils topics at the primary and secondary education levels throughout the nation. Properly functioning soils are the basis of ecosystem health, diversity, and sustainability. Yet, few people understand the importance of soil to life on this fragile planet we live on. The Smithsonian Soils Exhibit provides a wonderful and rare opportunity to portray this message to the American people.

For more detailed project information or to make a gift, please visit www.soils.org/smithsonian, or contact Paul Kamps, development officer, at (608) 268-4975 or pkamps@agronomy.org.



Soil monoliths will be a longterm display at the National Museum of Natural History, Washington, D.C. The 53 state and territorial monoliths, were loaned to the Museum by the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

SOILS: WORLDS UNDERFOOT, EXHIBIT TAKE-HOME MESSAGES

SOILS ARE LIVING.

- Soils contain innumerable organisms that are diverse in form and function.
- Soil organisms perform the vital function of decomposition.
- Compared to what we know about aboveground organisms, we know relatively little about life in the soil.

SOILS ARE VARIED.

- Soils differ from one another in many ways: mineralogy, texture, pH, moisture regime, temperature regime, degree of degradation.
- A soil's composition and characteristics affect its uses.
- Soils are named and classified based on properties and uses.

SOILS CHANGE OVER TIME.

- Soils are constantly being created and lost all over the globe.
- A soil profile is a snapshot in time. A soil evolves from parent material and changes over time. Climate, organisms, and topography mediate changes.

SOILS LINK THE EARTH'S LAND, AIR, AND WATER.

- Chemical elements and compounds move continuously in and out of the soil, to and from the atmosphere, hydrosphere, biosphere and lithosphere.
- Soils perform vital ecosystem services such as decomposing waste, regulating water circulation, filtering contaminants from water, and providing space and nutrients for plant growth.
- Soils influence climate.

SOILS ARE NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCES.

- Soils can be degraded by the actions of humans.
- Soil degradation has real consequences for everyone who depends on the soil's productivity and ecosystem services.
- There are many ways to prevent soil degradation, but reclaiming a degraded soil is costly and time-consuming.