

Worksheet I: *Interpreting a Soil Map*

Important information about soil zones can be obtained from soil maps. Before the information on a map can be described and analyzed, it is necessary to have a clear understanding of what the map is about. This is the first step in obtaining information from a map.

I. **What is the map about?** This involves previewing the map:

Inspect the title—by inspecting the title, you can find out the subject of the map, the area for which information is shown, and when the information was gathered.

Decode the symbols—by decoding the map symbols in the key (legend), you can find out what the symbols on the map mean.

Check the map scale—by checking the map scale, you can tell the relation between distance on the map and distance on the ground.

Examine the compass to find north—by knowing where north and other cardinal directions are make it possible to find and describe the location of features on the map.

Check the foot notes and additional information—by checking the map notes, you can tell the source of the information in the map.

Examine the Soil Map. Determine what it is about by completing the five tasks listed below. Write your answers in the spaces below. **NOTE:** The term MUSYM appears on the map. It means **Map Unit Symbol**. So, for example, Lyles loam is identified by the MUSYM Ly.

1. Inspect the title

2. Describe the symbols

3. Examine the scale

4. Use the compass to find north

5. Check the footnotes

2. **What does the map say?** The second step in obtaining information from a map involves asking and answering questions about how things are arranged on the map.

Ask and answer “fact finder” questions. Some questions are asked to find facts that are important. Answering “fact finders” supplies you with basic information about the features on the map.

Ask and answer “pattern finder” questions. Pattern finders ask how things are arranged over the map. A basic distinction is made among clustered, random, and uniform arrangements. With clustered arrangements, things are located close together. With uniform arrangement, things are uniformly spread over the area. With random arrangements, there is no pattern to how things are arranged. Answering pattern finders supplies you with information about the arrangement of features on the map.

Examine the Soil Map. Determine how the features on the map are arranged by answering the following questions. Write your answers in the spaces below

1. How many different soils appear on the map?

2. Are particular soils clustered, randomly or evenly distributed?

3. What characteristics do the soils in these two fields have in common?

3. **What does the map mean?** The information obtained from a map should be combined into a brief, well organized summary paragraph. This is the final step in obtaining information from a map. The summary involves speculating about the factors that could have led to the patterns in the distribution seen on the map and/or the possible implications of the patterns observed.

Finally, in the space provided, write a short paragraph summarizing this information. This summary paragraph should be comprised of five to six sentences that draw together the information obtained from the map.