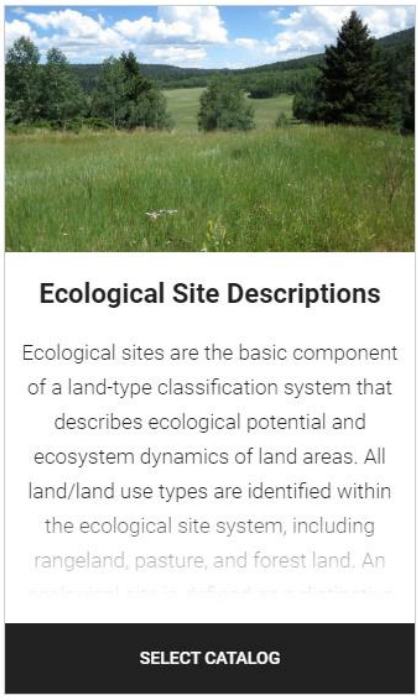
Finding Ecological Site Information – Why is this so hard?!?

Ecological site information (commonly contained in an ecological site description, or ESD), is very useful for interpreting monitoring data and for knowing what to expect from the land. However, getting to the ESD you need is not always a straightforward process. The good news is that over time it should get easier. The steps below will give you a couple of routes or options for finding ecological site information.

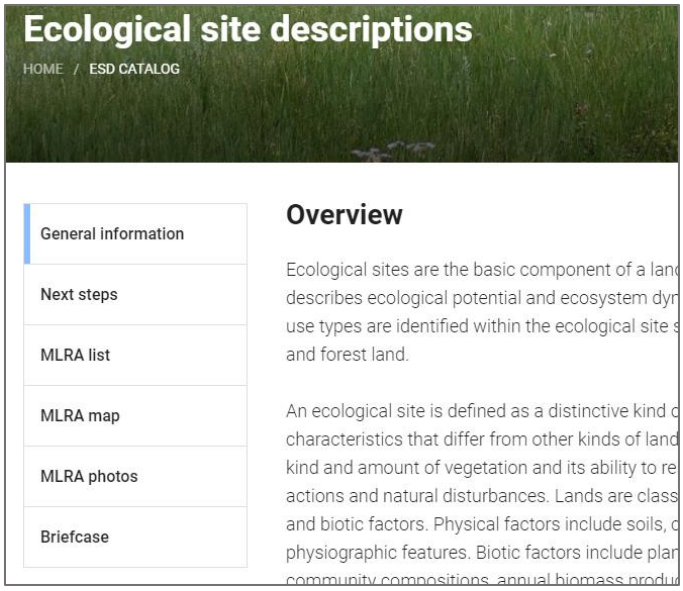
Option 1. Ecological Site Information from the EDIT web tool

The EDIT tool was created to replace the old NRCS Ecological Site Information System (ESIS) which was decommissioned. EDIT has a cleaner interface that can be easier to find ESDs once you get to know it. The problem with EDIT right now is that it does not have many of the provisional ESDs (which are the majority of them for Idaho). This should change over time, but for now you can use EDIT to find the ecological site name/number and then use the Field Office Technical Guide (instructions below) to get the provisional ESD reports.

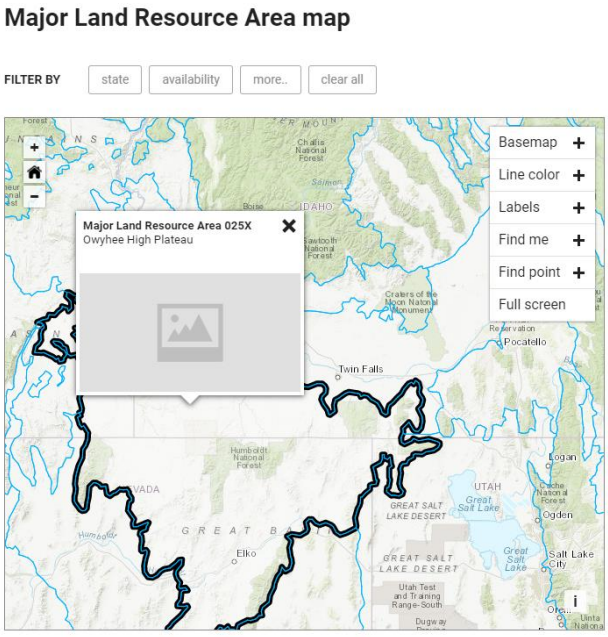
1. Navigate to https://edit.jornada.nmsu.edu/ in a web browser. Scroll down and click on the link that says "Select Catalog" for the Ecological Site Descriptions.



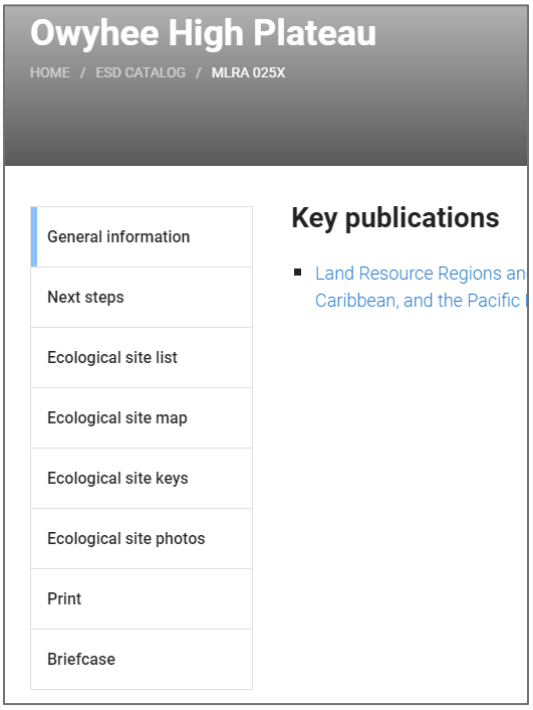
2. You must first choose a MLRA either by name/number or by the map interface. Click on the “MLRA map” link from the menu bar at the left of the page.



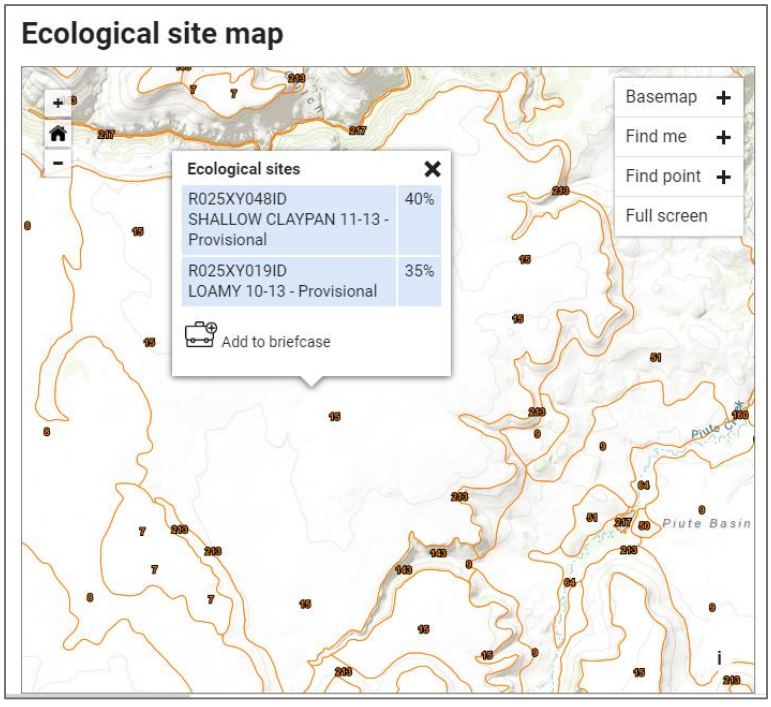
3. Zoom in and pan to the area you want from the MLRA map and click the map to highlight that MLRA. ***Selecting the MLRA from the map is a two-step process!*** First, click the MLRA name in the popup bubble, and then click the MLRA name again from the “Quick View” window. This will select and open a webpage for the MLRA.



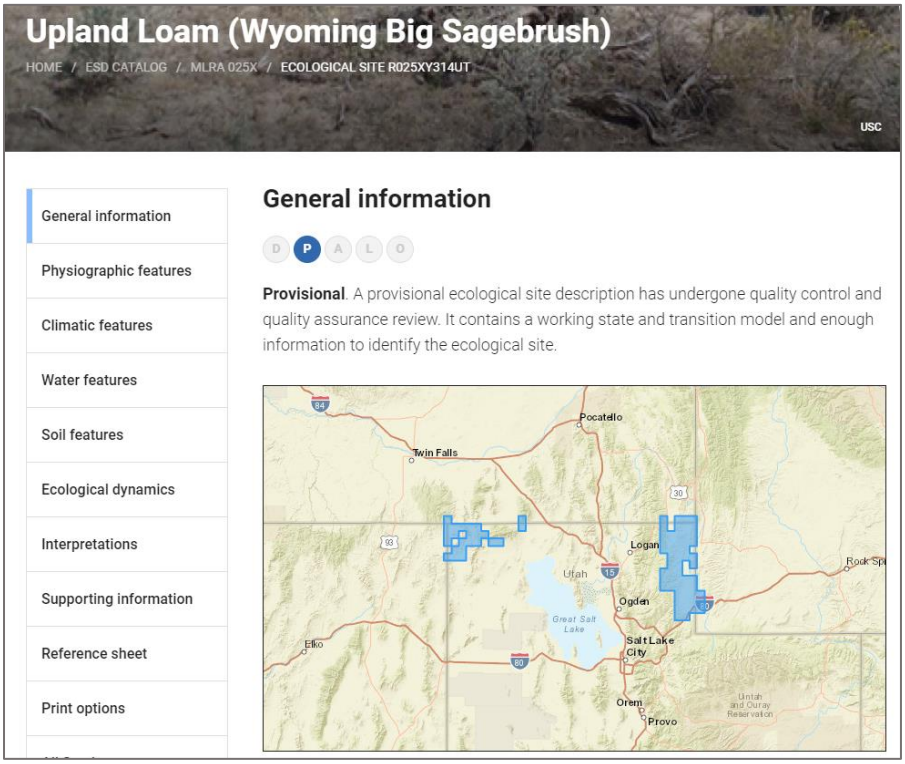
4. From the MLRA page, you can either choose to find ecological sites by the map (click the "Ecological site map" link), or if you want to see the complete list of what ESDs are in EDIT for that MLRA, click the "Ecological site list" link. For now, click the "Ecological site map" link.



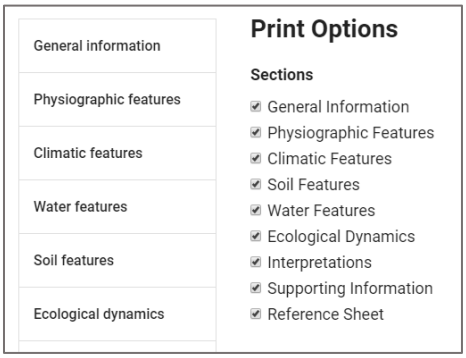
5. Soil map units from the SSURGO soil surveys are displayed once you zoom in far enough. Pan/Zoom to an area of interest, and click on a soil map unit polygon to select it. This will open a pop-up bubble that shows you the ecological sites expected in that soil map unit. The percentage value is the expected percent of the soil map unit polygon occupied by that ecological site.



6. Make note of the ecological site number (e.g., R025XY048ID) and the ecological site name (e.g., Shallow Claypan 11-13 – Provisional). Click on the ecological site name to open the ESD for that ecological site.



7. From the online ESD report in EDIT, you can choose “Print options” from the menu on the left to print or download (via PDF) the report.



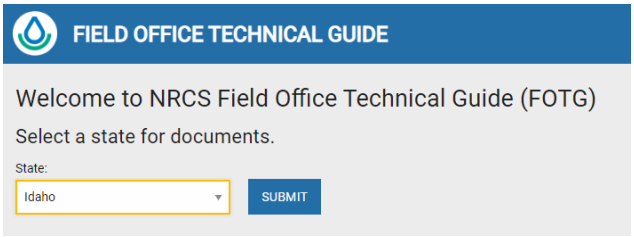
8. If you receive the following message when clicking on the ecological site name, close this window, make note of the ecological site name/number and see the option below for finding

the ESDs from the NRCS Field Office Technical Guide.

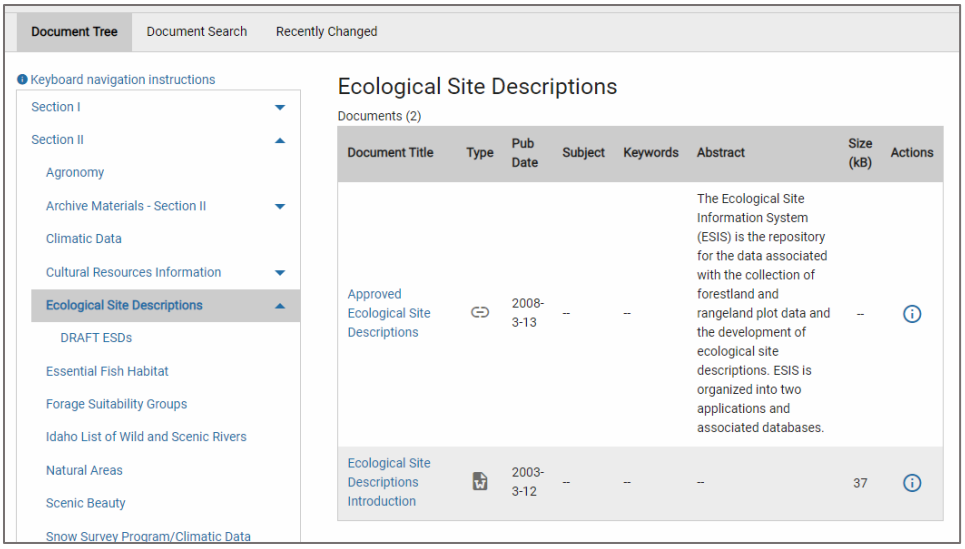
Option 2. Ecological Site Descriptions via the NRCS Field Office Technical Guide

The Field Office Technical Guide is the NRCS' online repository for technical documents. While it is all accessed through the same website now, it's important to remember that there are different sets of documents for each state. The instructions below will guide you through finding and downloading the ESDs for Idaho. Note that the ESDs available on the Field Office Technical Guide are oftentimes provisional or draft ESDs and may change frequently. It is recommended that you check in with NRCS or an Extension professional if you have a question about an ESD.

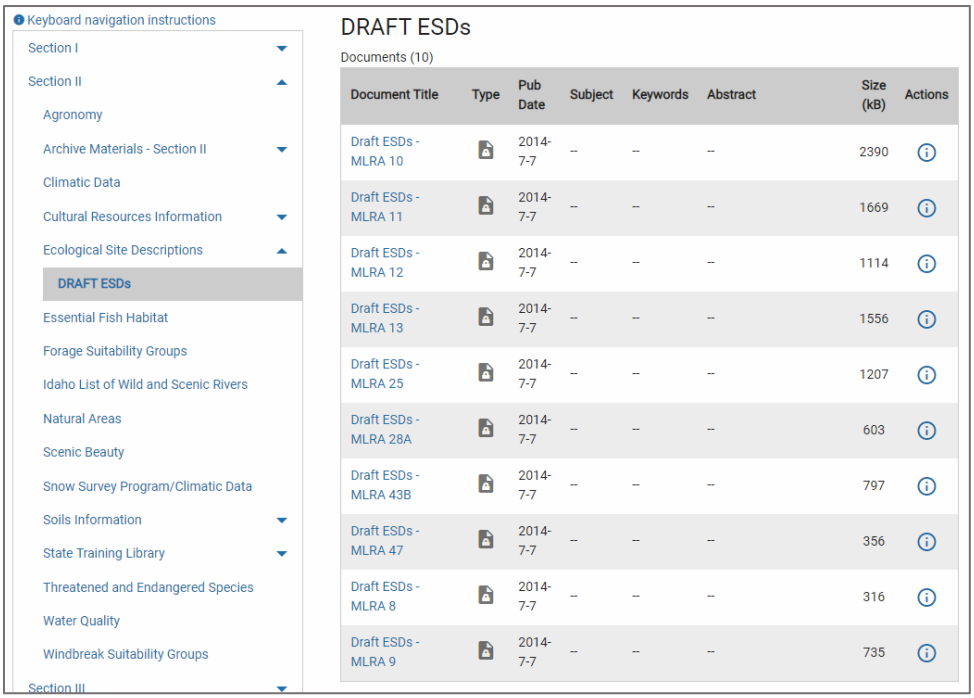
1. From a web browser, navigate to https://efotg.sc.egov.usda.gov/. Select "Idaho" from the drop-down menu and click "Submit."



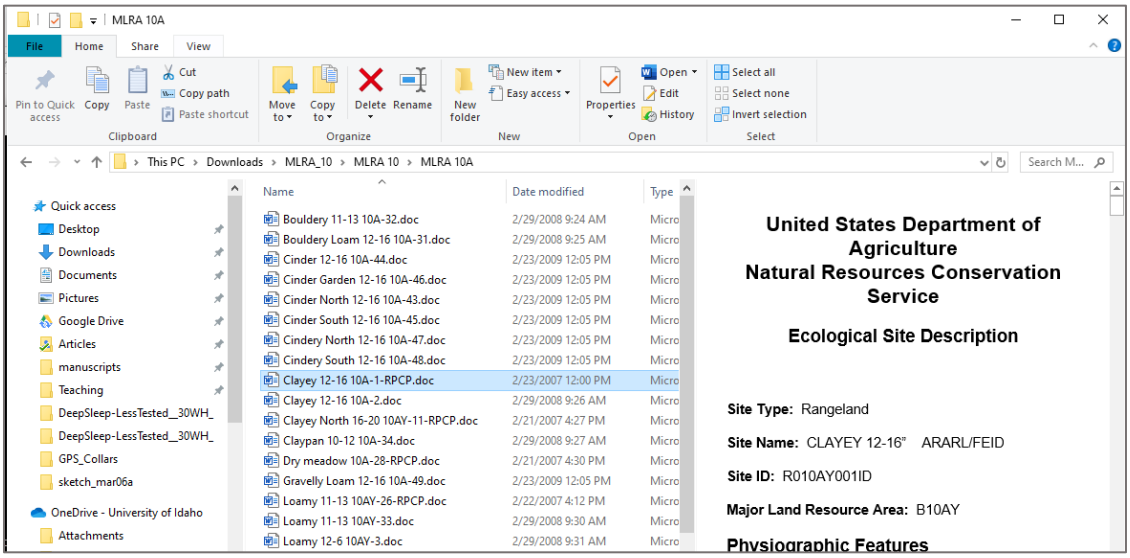
2. The Technical Guide for Idaho will open to a "Document Tree" that shows you something similar to a table of contents. The ESDs are located in Section II (click the Section II link to expand). ***Do not click the "Approved Ecological Site Descriptions" link. That will take you to the now defunct ESIS website. Instead, click the "DRAFT ESDs" link on the menu to the left.***



3. From the Draft ESDs page, select the MLRA you want to download all of the draft ESDs for the ecological sites in that MLRA. The MLRAs will download as a .ZIP file that you will need to uncompress (i.e., unzip) on your computer.



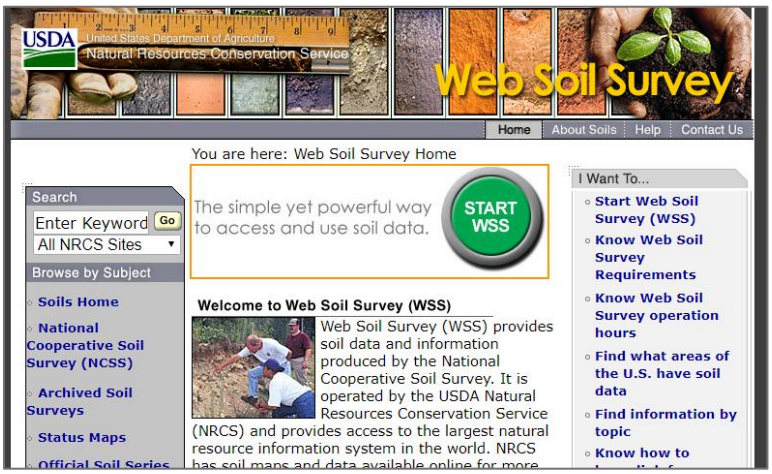
4. The downloaded MLRA folder will contain a Word document for each ESD. Using the name of the ecological site from EDIT (See option 1 above), locate and open the desired ESD.



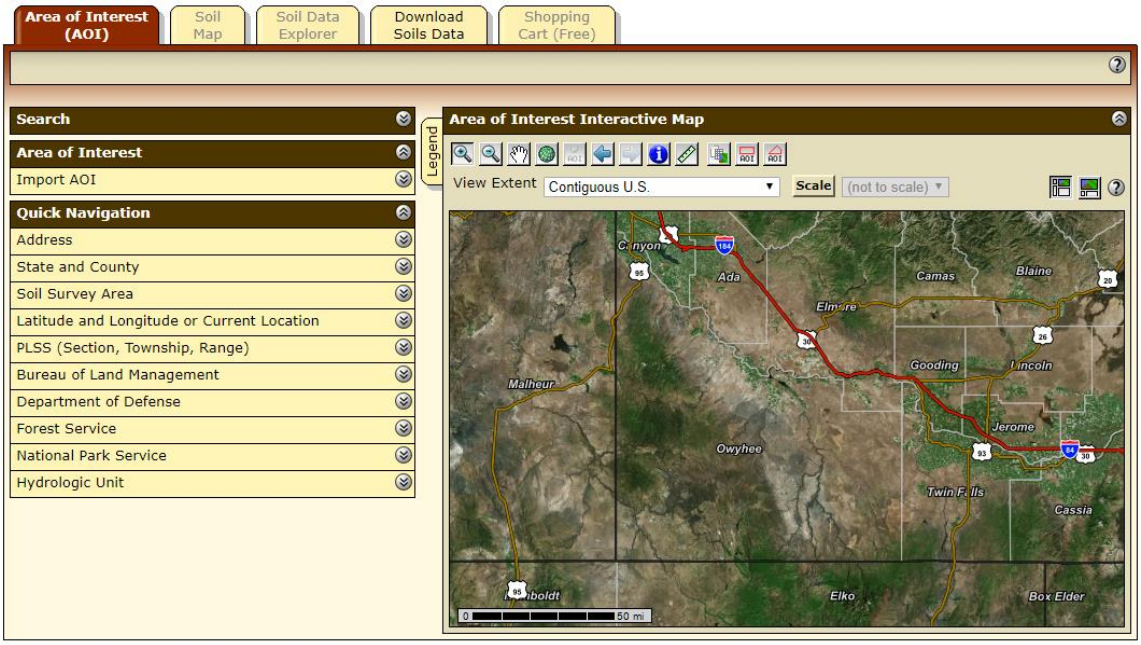
Option 3. Finding Ecological Site Names/Numbers via Web Soil Survey

Web Soil Survey used to contain easy-to-access information on ecological sites and link out directly to the NRCS Ecological Site Information System for accessing the ESD reports. That information is no longer available via Web Soil Survey, and instead, only links to EDIT are provided (so you might as well just use EDIT in the first place!).

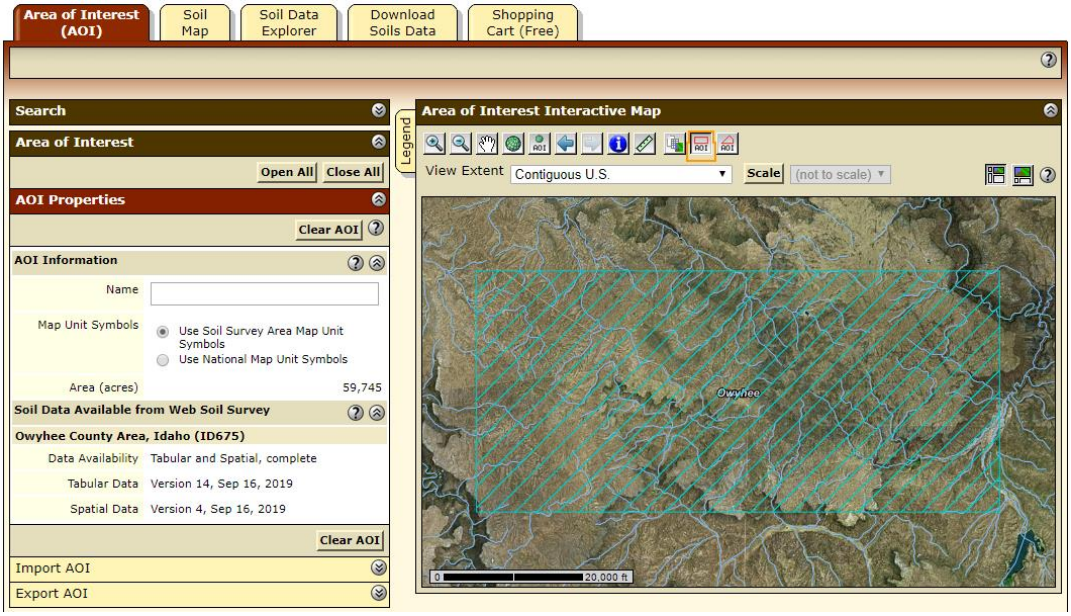
1. From a web browser, navigate to the Web Soil Survey web site – https://websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov. Click on the green circle to "Start WSS".



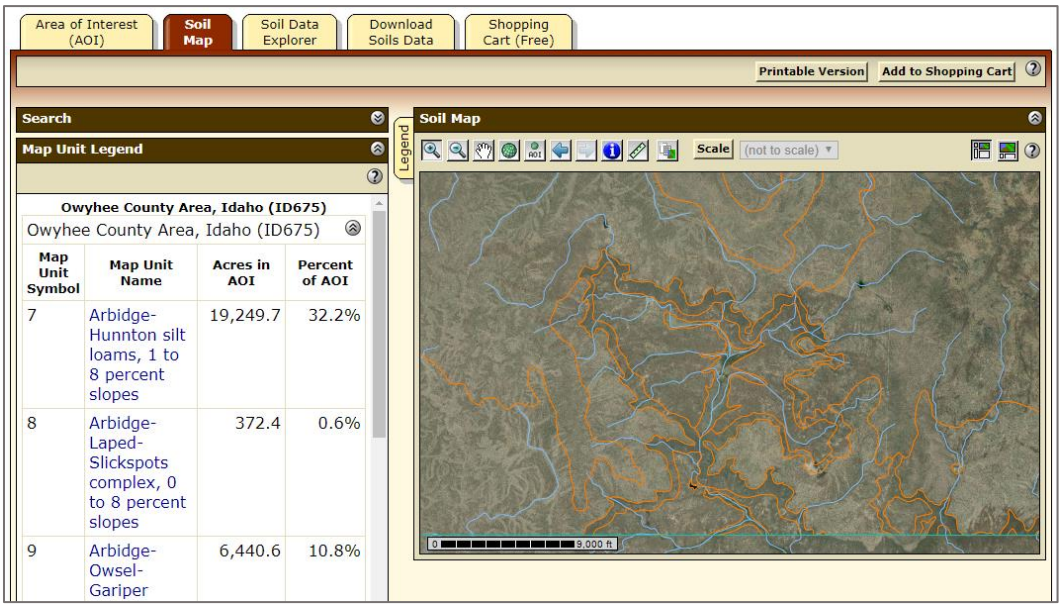
2. Under “Quick Navigation” you have several options to search by. Here you can start you search by navigating to the “State and County” or, use the “Latitude and Longitude” data you collected in the field.



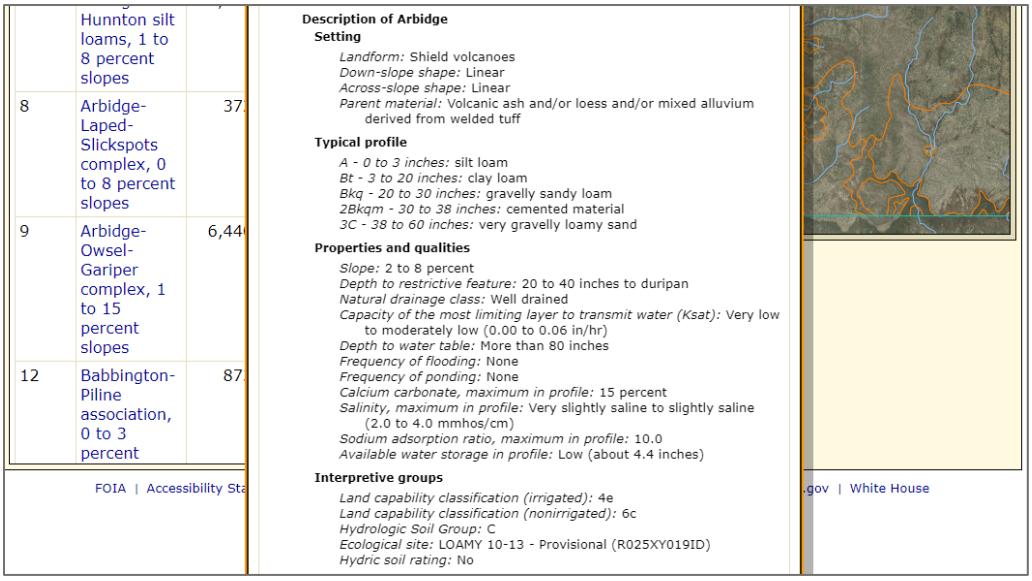
3. Once you are at the location where you collected data, zoom out so your map covers ~6,000-10,000 acres around your site. Use the area of interest tool (AOI) to outline the area. *It’s difficult to estimate the acres, however, if you select an area >10,000 acres you will get an error so you can judge from there.*



4. Click on the “Soil Map” tab near top of page, this provides the Map Unit Symbols and Map Unit Names.



5. Click on a soil map unit name. In the “Map Unit Description” box that opens, scroll down to find the ecological site name and number under the heading of “Interpretive Groups”.



	Hunnton silt loams, 1 to 8 percent slopes	
8	Arbidge-Laped-Slickspots complex, 0 to 8 percent slopes	37
9	Arbidge-Owsel-Gariper complex, 1 to 15 percent slopes	6,44
12	Babbington-Piline association, 0 to 3 percent	87

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Description of Arbidge

Setting

Landform: Shield volcanoes
Down-slope shape: Linear
Across-slope shape: Linear
Parent material: Volcanic ash and/or loess and/or mixed alluvium derived from welded tuff

Typical profile

A - 0 to 3 inches: silt loam
Bt - 3 to 20 inches: clay loam
Bkq - 20 to 30 inches: gravelly sandy loam
2Bkqm - 30 to 38 inches: cemented material
3C - 38 to 60 inches: very gravelly loamy sand

Properties and qualities

Slope: 2 to 8 percent
Depth to restrictive feature: 20 to 40 inches to duripan
Natural drainage class: Well drained
Capacity of the most limiting layer to transmit water (Ksat): Very low to moderately low (0.00 to 0.06 in/hr)
Depth to water table: More than 80 inches
Frequency of flooding: None
Frequency of ponding: None
Calcium carbonate, maximum in profile: 15 percent
Salinity, maximum in profile: Very slightly saline to slightly saline (2.0 to 4.0 mmhos/cm)
Sodium adsorption ratio, maximum in profile: 10.0
Available water storage in profile: Low (about 4.4 inches)

Interpretive groups

Land capability classification (irrigated): 4e
Land capability classification (nonirrigated): 6c
Hydrologic Soil Group: C
Ecological site: LOAMY 10-13 - Provisional (R025XY019ID)
Hydric soil rating: No

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6. Use the ecological site name/number to look up the ESD from the NRCS Field Office Technical Guide (See Option 2 above).