

It Will Be a Landmark Decision When They Come Down to Earth

By CARLEE R. SCOTT

Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

CHICAGO—Dirty politics is what it is, with mudslinging likely. But it's all for a good cause.

A band of earth devotees in Illinois is lobbying state lawmakers to designate an official state soil. After much digging, the group thinks it has hit pay dirt with Drummer silty clay loam, the state's most extensive soil.

The Illinois Soil Classifiers Association, a group of about 100 soil scientists who believe they're on firm ground in backing Drummer loam, is hoping that Gov. James Thompson will have a bill to sign by April 22, which is Earth Day.

And why not honor dirt? There's an official state tree, bird, fish, insect and mineral. Illinois even has an official state fossil, a prehistoric marine animal known as the Tully monster, or Tullimonstrum gregarium.

Besides, Illinois wouldn't be the first to shovel dirt on a pedestal. Bob McLeese, chairman of the Soil Classifiers' state soil committee, says about six other states have granted it official status.

"Soil is one of Illinois's most important assets," notes John Alexander, president of the Soil Classifiers, noting the impor-

tance of agriculture to the state's economy. "Much of the state's wealth is generated through its soil." It "should be recognized," he says.

The organization had its pick of more than 400 varieties of soil, such as Cisne silt loam, Ipava, Sable and Saybrook soils. But the dark, wet Drummer silty clay loam is indigenous to Illinois and covers much of the state, including its celebrated prairies.

The Soil Classifiers' efforts to designate a state soil began about five years ago, but there was little groundswell of support until a few legislators took interest. State Rep. Gordon Ropp, a Republican lawmaker from Bloomington, sponsored the bill and has already persuaded 20 colleagues to join him.

Without soil, such as Drummer silty clay loam, he contends, "the state tree wouldn't exist, the state butterfly wouldn't exist." Indeed, he adds, a state dirt should probably have been designated first.

Rep. Ropp anticipates that detractors will lob a few mudballs during legislative debate. "Some people think we ought to be doing other things," he says, and he expects some "tongue-in-cheek" comments as well. But, he maintains, "We shouldn't take soil lightly."

Wall Street Journal, Thursday 2/8/1990

Sunday News-Gazette - April 7, 1991

Stick-in-the-mud lawmakers keep state-soil bill grounded

By ANNE COOK
News-Gazette Staff Writer

Politicians are used to slinging mud and digging up dirt, but they're having trouble picking an official Illinois soil.

In fact, state legislators cracked jokes when they recently plowed under state Rep. Gordon Ropp's bill seeking to put Drummer silty clay loam on the same official footing as the state bird, the cardinal, and the state flower, the violet.

Ropp, a farmer who has a passion for dirt, is now trying to dig his bill out of political oblivion.

"Before we had a state anything, we should have started with a state soil," said the Bloomington Republican. "Without it, we wouldn't have had a state tree, flower, insect or other state things. The whole gamut hinges on what we walk on."

And political neophyte Bob Darmody, president of the Illinois Soil Classifiers' Association, says he's quickly learning how the wheels of government grind in Springfield.

"There was some talk about soil being a silly waste of lawmakers' time, but about the same time they turned our proposal down, they named the square dance the official state dance," said Darmody, a University of Illinois soil scientist.

"There's an inscription on the old UI agriculture building that says it all," he said. "It reads, 'The wealth of Illinois is in its soil.'"

ASSOCIATION MEMBERS started their soil campaign about four years ago, and they found a natural champion in Ropp, who farms in fertile McLean County. Ropp served as Illinois Director of Agriculture in the early 1970s under Gov. Richard Ogilvie.

Ropp said Drummer silty clay is "black, deep soil with good composition."

"If you had your choice of soils to farm, you'd want that one," he

'If we didn't have such good soil, we wouldn't have such rich agriculture or eat as well.'

— state Rep. Gordon Ropp

said.

Darmody said the association's 100 members — scientists, consultants, Soil Conservation Service employees — wrangled a bit about what soil to honor.

"There was some talk about Ipa-va and Tama, but they're officially Iowa's soils," he said. "The final runner-up was Cisne, the most common soil in southern Illinois. In the end, it was a north-south split."

BUT DRUMMER SOIL covered more ground — an estimated 1.6 million acres in Illinois — so it was the winner in science circles. A typical Drummer site is UI's South Farms, where scientists conduct a variety of field tests.

Darmody said about a dozen other states have official state soils, and the Illinois group followed their criteria, picking one that's identified, named and described in the annals of science as an Illinois resource.

Robert McLeese of rural Monticello — who moved to Illinois from Vermont where he'd just finished a successful campaign for a state soil — gave the movement a boost with his know-how, Darmody said.

In a letter to state legislators, McLeese noted that Illinois has state symbols that include: a tree (the white oak); a flower (the violet); an insect (the monarch butterfly); a fish (the bluegill); an animal (the white-tailed deer); a bird (the cardinal); a mineral (fluorite).

Illinois also has a state fossil: a prehistoric marine animal named *Tullimonstrum gregarium* and af-

fectionately called the Tully monster.

"These natural resources make Illinois the special place it is, and that's why they have been recognized," said McLeese, the official state soil scientist.

He said soil campaign supporters believe the best hope for long-term conservation of natural resources is developing "an awareness and strong conservation ethic in our young people."

"A state soil will serve as catalyst toward that goal," McLeese said.

Ropp introduced the soil bill last year. He said it easily passed the House but ran into a heated discussion in the Senate Agriculture Committee.

This year, it didn't make it out of the House, and Ropp said his colleagues "had a lot of fun with the issue."

"I heard things like, 'Now you're really into the dirt,'" he said.

ONE WESTERN ILLINOIS legislator didn't like the Drummer idea because he didn't have any of it in his district.

"It's like you can't select your own relatives," Ropp said. "Not every district has the state fossil. Cardinals aren't everywhere, and I don't have one single bluegill on my farm."

Another legislator took issue with Drummer because Abraham Lincoln is not buried in it. Several legislators suggested school children should choose the state soil, as they did the state fish and state animal.

"There's a difference," Ropp said, claiming that children understand fish and animals better than they do soil.

"If we didn't have such good soil, we wouldn't have such rich agriculture or eat as well," he said. "We're one of the leading corn and soybean states, and exports from states like ours are the one thing that halfway provides some national balance of trade."



News-Gazette photo by Delfina Colby

Robert Darmody, president of the Illinois Soil Classifiers' Association, sifts through some Drummer soil at the UI South Farms. Darmody and others want Drummer to be named the state's official soil.

"You don't grow that corn and soybeans on rock, sand, clay or swampland," Ropp said.

He said he'll reintroduce the bill sometime within the next month. He hopes hometown lobbying will sway the vote.

"I hope we can get it on the agreed list so it goes through with a hundred other bills," Ropp said.

Illinois (Land of Lincoln) Chapter Newsletter

Winter, 1989

state in our region attend the international meeting. The multi-state meeting will give those who are unable to attend the international meeting the chance to rub elbows with fellow members from other states. The West North Central Region includes Illinois, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, and Missouri.

More details will be forthcoming.

Earth Day is Back

Earth Day is officially on April 22nd and events are being planned for the entire week. Some may consider Earth Day for environmentalists, but it really is for anyone who is concerned with our natural resources. This is a great opportunity to focus attention and help educate children and adults on the wise use of our natural resources. There is no one big event being planned, but rather many local events. It is hoped that SWCS members would facilitate such local events. Some ideas are tree planting, TV to cover no-till planting, recycling seminars or many others.

Agriculture and Food Policy in an Interdependent World

The University of Illinois and League of Women Voters sponsored four roundtable discussions in Illinois on the 1990 Farm Bill. The Soil and Water Conservation Society was represented on the advisory committee by Dan Towery and had representatives at the four roundtable discussions held this fall in Springfield, Moline, Carbondale and Chicago. The four areas of discussion centered on the environment, international trade, commodities and food for the poor. No consensus was sought, but the results will be made available to congressional leaders.

Illinois Soil Classifiers Nominate a State Soil

White Oak, violet, monarch butterfly, white tailed deer, cardinal and bluegill. Do you know what these things have in common?

They are all official state symbols of Illinois and they all depend on soil for their existence. Yet, we have no official state soil.

Soils are our most basic natural resource. They are a commonplace feature of nature, but they are often not well understood or appreciated. The Illinois Soil Classifiers Association (ISCA) decided that something needed to be done to inform the public of the vast importance of the soil resources of the state.

In March 1985 the ISCA appointed a State Soil Committee

to select one soil to represent the soil resources of Illinois and to be designated by the General Assembly and the Governor as the State Soil of Illinois. The Committee identified factors they felt should be considered in the selection process. They included origin and classification, productivity, distribution and extent, and name recognition.

During 1986, ISCA members were invited to nominate soils to be considered for the official state soil. Seven soils were nominated. They were the Cisne, Drummer, Flanagan, Hoyleton, Ipava, Sable, and Saybrook soils.

In January 1987, a ballot by mail election was held and ISCA members voted for the soil they felt would best represent the soil resources of Illinois. Drummer silty clay loam was selected by more than a 2 to 1 margin over Cisne silt loam.

The next step on the road to enshrinement as the official state soil is to obtain legislative sponsorship and approval of a State Soil bill. Representative Gordon Ropp from Bloomington will be introducing a State Soil bill this next legislative session. The goal of ISCA is to have the Governor sign a bill designating Drummer silty clay loam as the State Soil of Illinois on April 22, Earth Day.

Editors note: The Soil and Water Conservation Society has offered their support to the Illinois Soil Classifiers in this effort.

Please forward your letters of support or any comments to: Bob McLeese, Chairman, ISCA State Soil Committee, R.R. 1, Box 238, Monticello, IL 61856; Phone: 217/762-7697.

SWCS Leadership Workshop

Three members from Illinois attended the West North Central Regional Leadership Conference at Ankeny, Iowa on November 8th and 9th. The workshop was at the SWCS National Headquarters. Those attending from Illinois were Dan Towery, President, Dave King, Vice-President, and Mark Kaiser, President-Section I. Other members from Iowa, Minnesota, Wisconsin and Missouri also attended. The workshop focused on improving membership communication and leadership skills.

UPCOMING EVENTS

January 24-25 — "Moving Towards Sustainability" Conference, Illinois Department of Agriculture, State Fairgrounds, Springfield, IL.

January 26 — SWCS Illinois Chapter Board Meeting, Springfield, IL.

April 22 — EARTH DAY 1990.

Action for Water Quality

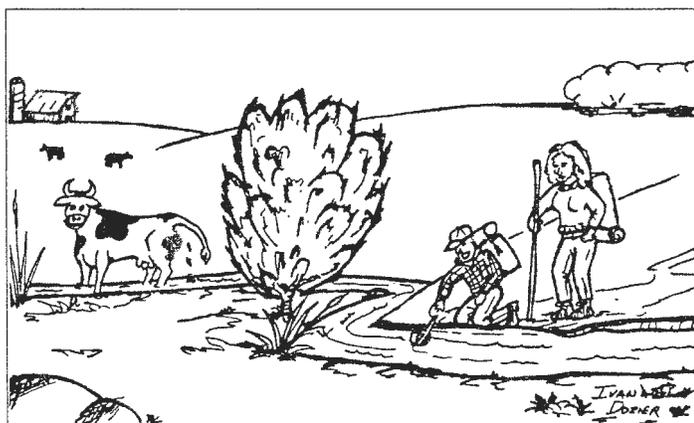
The Illinois Chapter joined with 18 other organizations to focus on key issues affecting local water supplies at this year's annual meeting on October 23 and 24. The two day meeting consisted of a water quality tour, awards banquet, annual meeting, and water quality conference.

Fifty-five people participated on the tour, which was sponsored by the City of Bloomington and the McLean County Soil and Water Conservation District. Stops at Evergreen Lake, Lake Bloomington, and BASF Agronomic Research Center generated a variety of water quality discussions.

The following Chapter awards were presented at the Awards Banquet.

Chapter Recognition Awards:

Tom Bicki, Terry Donohue, Laura Dufford, Nancy Erickson, Gary Fak, Bob Greene, Harry Hendrickson, Mark Kaiser, Dave King, Rebecca McKee, Bob McLeese, Jerry Mizek, Art Sechrest



Should cocklebur be state weed?

By **CHERI BENTRUP**
Daily News Staff

It's hard to believe.

Who would've thought that anyone would lobby our General Assembly to name an official state soil? Yes, you read it right. The Illinois Soil Classifiers Association recently formed a group to lobby for official dirt.

It's a dirty job, but somebody has to do it. At least that's what they must be thinking. Personally, I'm still wondering why we needed a state fossil.

The association, of which many members are employed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Soil Conservation Service, formed the State Soil Committee to lobby lawmakers to name Drummer silty clay loam the state soil — no fooling. Apparently, that type of soil covers more than 1.6 million acres of the state.

State Rep. Gordon Ropp, a Republican from Normal, said he'd sponsor the bill saying it has "as much priority as the Tully monster." You can't argue with that.

It makes one wonder what



Bentrup

could be next.

We already have a state flower, bird, animal, mineral, tree and insect.

This past summer I heard the General Assembly named the Big Blue Stem the state's official prairie grass. After all, what would the "Prairie State" be without an official prairie grass?

It was back in Mrs. Perne's fifth-grade social studies class that we learned about Illinois and its state symbols. Then we only had to worry about memorizing the state bird, flower, mineral and tree.

Our class took sides as we heatedly debated whether the

General Assembly should name the white-tailed deer or the opossum as the official state animal.

Five years after my class decided the opossum would dutifully represent our fine state, the General Assembly named the deer the official state animal on Jan. 1, 1982.

To my surprise we have a state fish — the bluegill. The most recent Illinois Handbook I could find, 1987-88, stated that school children voted on the fish in 1986 and was awaiting state approval. Somehow, I think that since we named a fossil as a state symbol — the Tully monster — chances are that the fish has already been officially approved, too.

After a little brainstorming in the newsroom, and being a former "farm girl" myself, we decided that now Illinois needs an official state weed. My father voiced his support for the cocklebur.

Maybe the Illinois Soil Classifiers Association could also rally behind a cause to name an official state weed. After all, weeds grow in soil, too, and they probably thrive in Drum-

mer silty clay loam.

I can imagine the laughs that would get from the farmers, including my father. It's a necessity that all farmers have a great sense of humor, you know. (After all, my Dad was laughing last weekend when he said my brother's Christmas present would arrive when the Mississippi River thaws.)

My father would probably cast his vote for the cocklebur, which seems to mysteriously reappear each year indifferent to the multitudes of herbicides applied. It's my guess that the morning glories or velvet leaves which undoubtedly get tangled in the combine each year would also be good choices for such an "honor."

At this time I don't know what will be next, but I can't imagine the General Assembly taking the time to name an official state soil.

I would imagine the fifth graders back at my former school are trying desperately to remember how to spell *Tullimonstrum gregarium*. Maybe next year's class will be bewildered with memorizing Drummer silty clay loam.

Letters

Soil important to state

I was quite disappointed in Cheri Bentrup's recent article "Should cocklebur be state weed?" (Jan. 3, 1990). It made me wonder if she appreciates our natural resources, as you would think a "former farm girl" should.

If the Illinois Soil Classifiers Association, the Soil and Water Conservation Society, and other groups which have shown their support for the state soil effort are successful, then Drummer silty clay loam soon will take its place next to the white oak, the violet, the cardinal, the monarch butterfly, the white-tailed deer, the bluegill and the big blue stem as one of Illinois' official state symbols. These natural resources are indispensable to the support and growth of a strong and prosperous state and, indeed, are the things that make Illinois a special place.

Illinois' future depends on soils. They produce our food, fiber and paper; they serve as foundations for our houses, highways and airports; and they support our plants. But soil is one of the many commonplace features of nature that is not well understood or appreciated. And all of the other state symbols depend on soil for their existence.

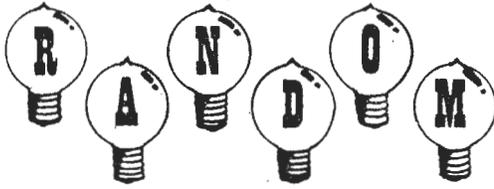
In Illinois, the state symbols never really have been used to their educational potential. Part of the reason is that no one ever has attempted to really tie them together and to explain their relationship and interdependence. The state soil provides the medium to truly relate and promote our state symbols. Our hope is that the state soil will provide our organization and other conservation and natural resource

groups (and Mrs. Perne) with a symbol to help in our education efforts.

Some states may be going a bit too far with their official state symbols (and maybe we did with the "Tully monster"). But we hope, in Illinois, that we don't go overboard on promoting every "this and that" and that we recognize only those resources that really make Illinois a special place. And, of course, we believe that the soil resources need to be recognized and will defend a state soil to the "dirty end."

When asked about a state soil, Rep. Gordon Ropp, sponsor of the State Soil Bill, responded, "Soil has made our state great in terms of its agricultural heritage. Maybe that should have been the symbol we started with." We agree!

Bob McLeese, Chairman,
CA State Soil Committee,
Ill. Soil Classifiers Association



THOUGHTS

From the mind of JACK VERTREES



New Vote Should Put Cisne Soil At The Top Of The List

In the world of silly, silty things, we're about to get dirtied up in Illinois, and we're supposed to feel good about it, or at least we think so.

We're glad some folks have some serious things to worry about, considering how things are around the planet earth. Well, there is an organization with an imposing name of "Illinois Soil Classifiers Association" and this esteemed organization is unhappy that Illinois has a white oak tree, a violet flower, a monarch butterfly, a white tail deer, a cardinal bird and a blue gill fish as our state's official symbols. Yet we have no official state soil.

The Association says all of the above symbols depend on the soil for their existence but still no official soil symbol has been proclaimed. They want to change all that by Earth Day on Apr. 22, with designation of the Drummer silty clay loam as our most symbolic soil. But we think it's a dirt-y deal because the Cisne soil came in second and in our opinion, should have come in first, because we got the only Cisne town in Illinois that we know about and it would be nice to be symbolic in every respect.

They say that the Drummer silty clay loam won by a two to one vote over Cisne silt loam but we're gonna ask for a new vote. And believe it or not, seven soils were nominated to be our Illinois state

soil, and here all we thought we had underneath our feet was a lot of plain old dirt. We're apparently rolling in silt and loam and didn't even know it. It sure makes me feel good to know that our Drummer silty soil is underfoot. And now, to some lesser world problems.

A look at the calendar shows just over another month for the 1990 Pink Press to come out. It needs a letter from you if you are a Wayne County wanderer, to keep it the successful issue it has been for a hundred years. Write today and get that letter in the mail. Letters are sought from all Wayne County wanderers but this year is especially the right time for members of the FCHS classes of 1940 and 1965 to write, as the 50 and 25 years ago classes are especially honored each year. Your help is needed!

Someone brought in a clip from the Chicago Tribune which noted the U.S. Energy Dept. has dropped an appeal in that uranium plant radiation case at Fernald in southwest Ohio. The feds have agreed to quit fighting a \$78 million settlement for folks in Fernald for loss of property values, emotional distress and illness in that big radiation leak there. But there's a catch to the government's good intentions—the government has said it won't pay the \$78 million from a federal contingency fund as planned because the lawsuit wasn't brought

Continued On Page 3

Wayne County Press - Fairfield
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Drive under way to select official state soil of Illinois

By MIKE GILLINGHAM
Agri-News Publications

MONTICELLO, Ill. — Illinois has a state symbol for a bird, tree, flower, insect, deer and even a fish. But it doesn't have a sym-

'...this is a national resource that makes Illinois what it is — a great agricultural state.'

— Bob McLeese
chairman
Illinois Soil
Classifiers Association

bol for one important resource which ties them all together.

That resource is soil, a basic feature of nature which all of the above-mentioned official state symbols rely on in some way for their existence.

To better educate the public on this matter, the Illinois Soil Classifiers Association has appointed a committee to nominate one soil to serve as the official state soil of Illinois. Another state designated such a symbol about one decade ago.

"I think Nebraska was the first state in the country to have an official state soil," explained Bob McLeese, chairman of the association and state soil scientist with the Soil Conservation Service. "They were the first ones to get the ball rolling in the late 1970s or early 1980s."

Getting the ball rolling in Illinois wasn't easy to begin with, said McLeese. The nomination process was a difficult task, since more than 400 soil series have been identified in Illinois. To determine the best official state soil, the committee considered such factors as origin and classification of the soil, as well as productivity, distribution, extent and name recognition. "We were really trying to find something that really represented the soil resources of the state," he added.

Seven soils were eventually nominated: Cisne, Drummer, Flanagan, Hoyleton, Ipava, Sable and Saybrook.

A ballot-by-mail election was conducted in January 1987 in which ISCA members voted for the soil they thought would best represent Illinois' soil resources. "Drummer silty clay loam was selected by more than a 2-to-1

margin over Cisne silt loam," McLeese reported.

Drummer, one of the more productive soils in the state, was voted the favorite since it also covers a wide area of farmland. More than 1.6 million acres of Drummer have been mapped in 39 of Illinois' 102 counties. Most of those counties are in Northern or Central Illinois.

The Drummer series was established in Ford County in 1929. McLeese pointed out that soil series are generally named for a nearby geographic location. Drummer, a wet, dark-colored "prairie soil," was named after Drummer Creek in Drummer Township.

"If you talk to any farmer and ask him about Drummer silty clay loam, he will know what you are talking about," McLeese said of the soil. "While the general public in Bloomington or Decatur may not recognize it, those who deal with rural land are familiar with the name."

Before Drummer could be named the official state soil, McLeese said the project would have to obtain legislative sponsorship and subsequent approval by the legislature and governor.

State Rep. Gordon Ropp, R-Bloomington, has agreed to introduce the bill in January. McLeese said ISCA's goal is to have Gov. James Thompson sign the bill by April 22, 1990, which is Earth Day.

"The week before Earth Day is Earth Week, and this will mark the 20th anniversary of the first Earth Week which was observed in April 1970," McLeese noted. "Our goal is to get this through the legislative system by April 22. We don't know if this will happen, but we hope to get to enough legislators once the bill is introduced and get them to see the importance of this and how it ties in."

The uniqueness of the bill may have some legislators wondering if it's worth the effort, McLeese mentioned, but the ISCA is prepared to tackle any problems along the way.

"We know we could get some comments that this is a waste of time and the taxpayers dollars and we shouldn't be doing it. Some might ask, 'What are we going to have next — a state dog or state cat?' But this just opens the door for us to respond in a serious manner and point out that

this is a national resource that makes Illinois what it is — a great agricultural state."

McLeese said he thinks the bill will be passed and the effort will help to educate people about the state's soil resources, in addition to conservation efforts. "We think it would provide a good education

tool if we had that state symbol and it really isn't a waste of time," he said.

The ISCA, a non-profit group comprised of about 100 soil scientists, is being assisted in the project by the Illinois Soil and Water Conservation Society.

Designation would recognize state's reliance on soil

By CHRIS ANDERSON
Pantagraph farm editor

Soil scientists believe well-intentioned Illinois residents put the cart before the horse over the last several decades in designating such symbols as the state bird, flower, tree, insect, animal and even an official state fossil.

All the symbols, the scientists note, rely on soil for their existence. With help from Rep. Gordon Ropp, R-Normal, they plan to rectify the situation by designating a state soil.

A bill recognizing Drummer silty clay loam as Illinois' soil may be introduced as soon as Wednesday, according to Ropp. Officially established as a soil type 61

years ago in Ford County, Drummer is the most prevalent soil comprising 1.6 million acres in the state.

"My feeling is that soil is the foundation of the state. It has enabled us to be strong agriculturally," said Ropp, a farmer and former Illinois agriculture director. "I don't expect a controversy concerning the bill, but every bill introduced during this session must pass through rules committee. If the speaker of the house thinks a bill has low priority, it may be delayed."

Bob McLeese, chairman of the Illinois Soil Classifiers Association state soil committee, said plans include having Drummer silty

clay loam designated the state soil on Earth Day, April 22.

"Many people may think a bill to designate a state soil as trivial. By the time it gets three readings in the House and Senate, I don't think we can make it by Earth Day," said the Towanda native.

As an alternative, committee members are working with Gov. James R. Thompson's office to have a proclamation signed on Earth Day supporting the legislation. Ropp added that Earth Day supporters may help push the bill through by April.

"With all the state symbols, maybe we started with the wrong one," said McLeese, with the Illinois Soil Conservation Service.

"Symbols are what make the state a unique place. So, we sought one that would represent the state's soil resources."

The effort to identify such a soil started nearly five years ago. A committee was appointed by the soil association, a nonprofit, educational organization aimed at promoting soil science.

In January 1987, association members were asked to vote for the soil they believed would best represent Illinois. Drummer silty clay loam, predominant in the Pantagraph area, emerged the winner by a 2 to 1 margin. The Illinois Soil and Water Conservation Society also supports Drummer for the state soil des-

ignation.

According to McLeese, soil selection was based on a rigid set of criteria. Committee members, he said, agreed that the soil should be one formed from prairie vegetation, be highly productive agriculturally and occur extensively in the state.

They further noted that the state soil should be one that originated in Illinois. The name, they noted, should be easily pronounced and have been in use for a long time.

Drummer fit the bill. Named for Drummer Creek in Ford County, such soils formed during the last glaciation period thou-

sands of years ago along the Bloomington Moraine that runs from Peoria County south to Charleston.

High in organic matter, Drummer typifies "good, black dirt" in that it developed under a luxuriant growth of marsh grasses.

If Drummer silty clay loam becomes Illinois' state soil, it will join six other soils given similar designation. Nebraska was the first to name a state soil in 1979. Vermont followed suit in 1985 at the urging of McLeese, who served as assistant state soil conservationist at the time. Wisconsin, Oklahoma, Florida and Iowa also have state soils.

'Silty clay loam' named official Illinois state soil

SPRINGFIELD (AP) — Show some respect the next time you clean mud off your shoes. You might be scraping away the official state soil.

Gov. George Ryan signed legislation Thursday that names "Drummer silty clay loam" the official Illinois soil.

"Illinois has some of the best crop-producing land on Earth thanks to

our dark, rich soils," Ryan said in a statement. "This legislation pays homage to our agricultural heritage and to the land that has supported our farmers."

Drummer silty clay loam is the most common Illinois soil, covering more than 1.5 million acres and yielding some of the best corn and soybean crops in the nation.