



Media only: Randall Kremer (202) 633-2950
Kelly Carnes (202) 633-2950

June 6, 2008

Media Web site: <http://newsdesk.si.edu>

New Natural History Exhibition Reveals the Impact of Soil on All Life on Earth

There are more living creatures in a shovel-full of soil than human beings on the planet, yet more is known about the dark side of the moon than about soil. These are just a couple of the fascinating facts visitors can learn from the new temporary exhibition “Dig It! The Secrets of Soil,” open July 19 through Jan. 3, 2010 at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of Natural History.

The 5,000-square-foot exhibition reveals the complex world of soil and how this hidden ecosystem supports nearly every form of life on Earth. The exhibition is sponsored by the Soil Science Society of America and the Nutrients for Life Foundation, which is underwritten by The Fertilizer Institute.

“Dig It!” includes interactive displays, hands-on models, videos and soil samples. Curious visitors will get the dirt on this little-known subject through audiovisual and interactive components, from a set of interactive soil stratigraphy blocks to a crime scene investigation video focusing on the processes of decay to a computer kiosk where visitors can learn about their state soil.

Visitors can also explore soil found in their own backyard and in obscure locations, with 54 soil samples representing each U.S. state and territory and the District of Columbia, as well as soil maps and touchable soil models from around the world. In doing so, visitors will discover a world teeming with life. In fact, so many organisms contribute to the health of soil that scientists have not even named them all.

“This is the most ambitious exhibition ever dedicated to soil, a resource as important to life on Earth as water and air,” said Patrick Megonigal, soil scientist for the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center, which is located in Maryland near the Chesapeake Bay. Megonigal is the exhibition’s lead curator.

“Dig It!” shows how every type of soil is unique. Visitors can observe the way water moves through different soils in tumbler tubes containing sand, silt, clay and loam. The flow of water through

soil can affect minerals and gases and all life that depends on soil. Soil color tells fascinating stories about mineral compositions and soil formation or history. “Dig It!” color cards help visitors to unveil the stories behind soil samples. Visitors also can get in touch with their inner detective and learn about the soil food web in the “Matters of Life and Death Theater.”

“The mission of this exhibition to educate millions about the importance of soils truly aligns with the Soil Science Society of America’s own purpose of advancing soils as being fundamental to life,” said SSSA President Gary A. Peterson. “Soil has an impact on climate change and our carbon footprint, among other important environmental issues.

After examining soil close up, exhibition visitors can step back and see the “big picture” with a world map and interactive stations that present the connection between soil and global systems. Models demonstrate the roles of soil around the house and the formation of soil in commercial and residential construction, dams, playing fields, neighborhoods, roads and in food production. An evocative video explains soil’s role as a “secret ingredient” in such household goods as medicines, food, wine, textiles, paint, cosmetics and pottery.

“The exhibition paints a remarkable picture of soils and their role as a reservoir of life,” said Ford West, The Fertilizer Institute and Nutrients for Life Foundation president. “Preserving the health of soils around the globe is critical to our ability to produce nutritious foods for future generations.”

Following its showing at the National Museum of Natural History, “Dig It!” will travel to 10 museums across the country through 2013 under the auspices of the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service. For more information about the traveling exhibition, visit www.sites.si.edu/soils. Additional information about “Dig It! The Secrets of Soil” is available at <http://forces.si.edu/soils>.

The National Museum of Natural History, located at 10th Street and Constitution Avenue N.W. in Washington, D.C., welcomed more than 7 million visitors in 2007. The museum is open daily from 10 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. through Aug. 31 and from 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. thereafter. Admission is free. More information about the museum is available at www.mnh.si.edu or by calling Smithsonian Information at (202) 633-1000, TTY (202) 633-5285.

###