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Uncovering the Soil Surveys

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Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

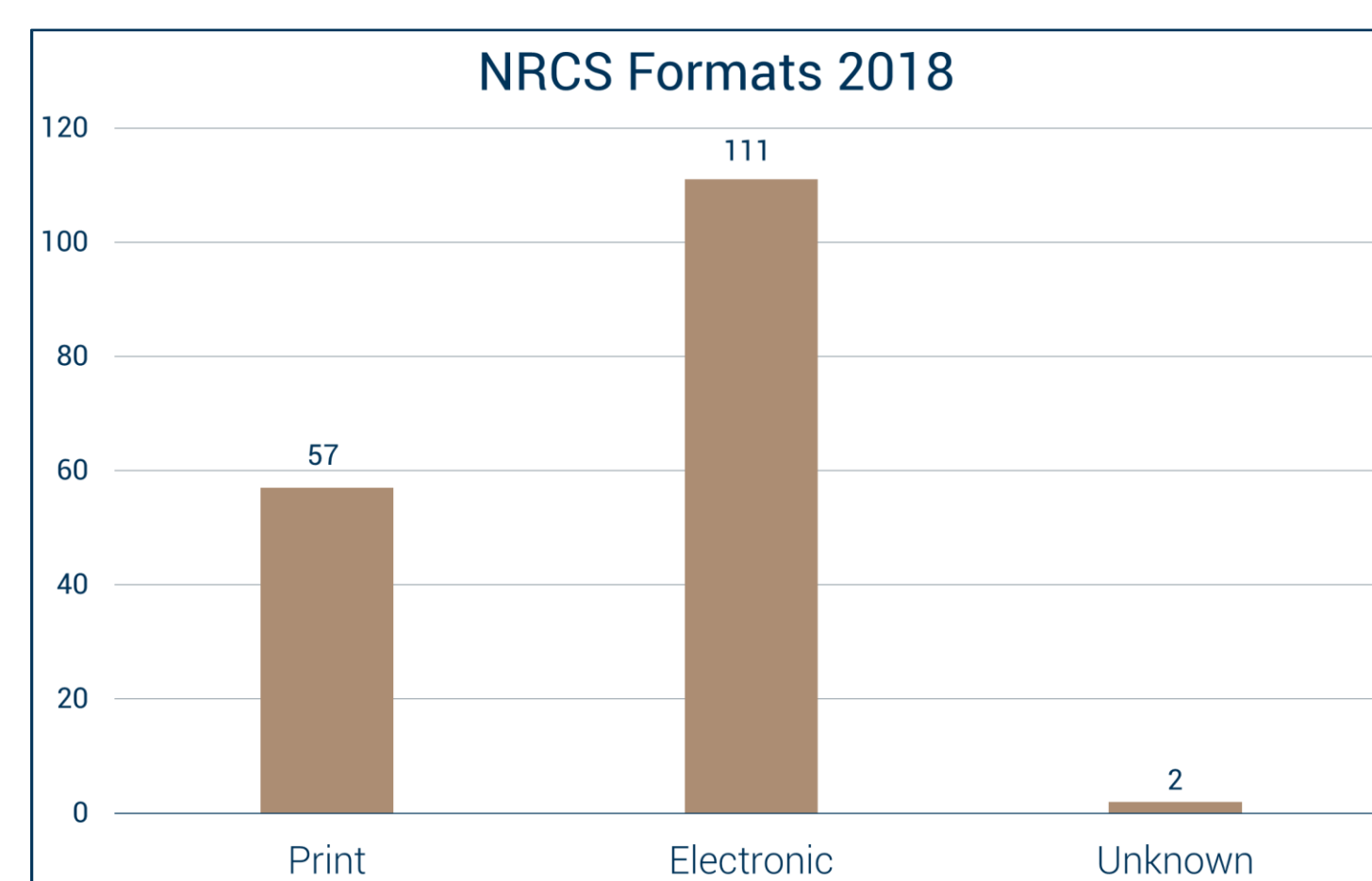
The NRCS website has digitized historic publications to improve public access to a variety of their materials, including the soil surveys (History of NRCS).

Federal Depository Library Program

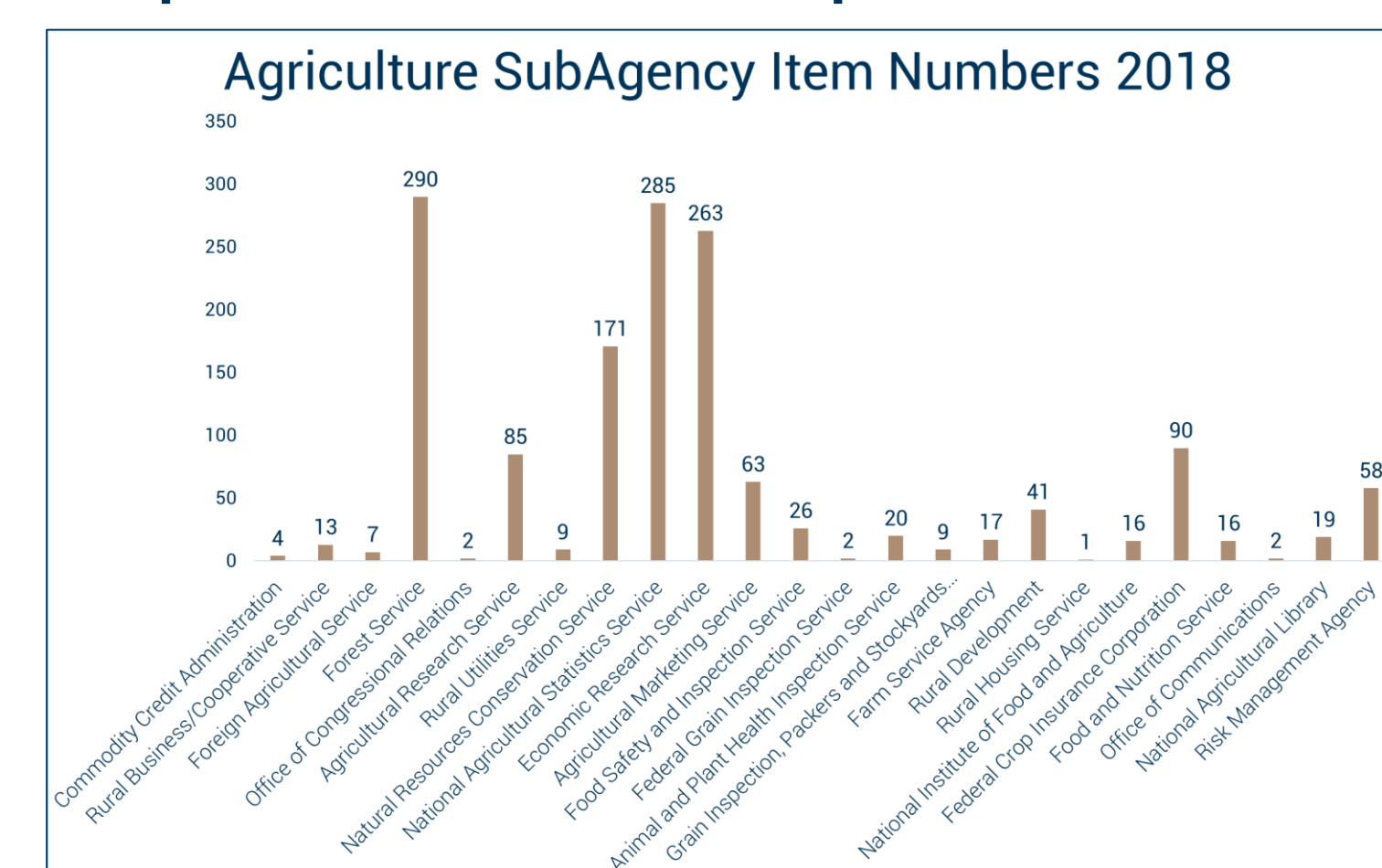
Uncovering the Soil Surveys requires understanding the mechanics of the Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP), which brings soil surveys to libraries across the U.S. These terms helped us investigate the surveys:

Government Publishing Office (GPO) – U.S. agency in charge of printing/distribution; administers the FDLP. Agencies are not required to utilize GPO's services but are required to distribute materials via the FDLP.

Format – Assigned by agency. May change at publication or may not be defined prior to publication.



Item Number (Item #) – Assigned by GPO to a series. Depositories select publications through item #, which



are not restricted by format or frequency. They remain static if a Title changes ("Item Number System," 2014). Item #s contain multiple publications.

Sub-Agency – An entity within an agency responsible for publications. NRCS is a USDA sub-agency.

List of Classes – GPO list with Item #, SuDoc, Title, Geography, Frequency, Format, Agency & Sub-Agency.

Historic Shelflist (HS) – Project to catalog all items referenced in GPO's historic card catalog. Dedicated project staff, free records via GitHub.

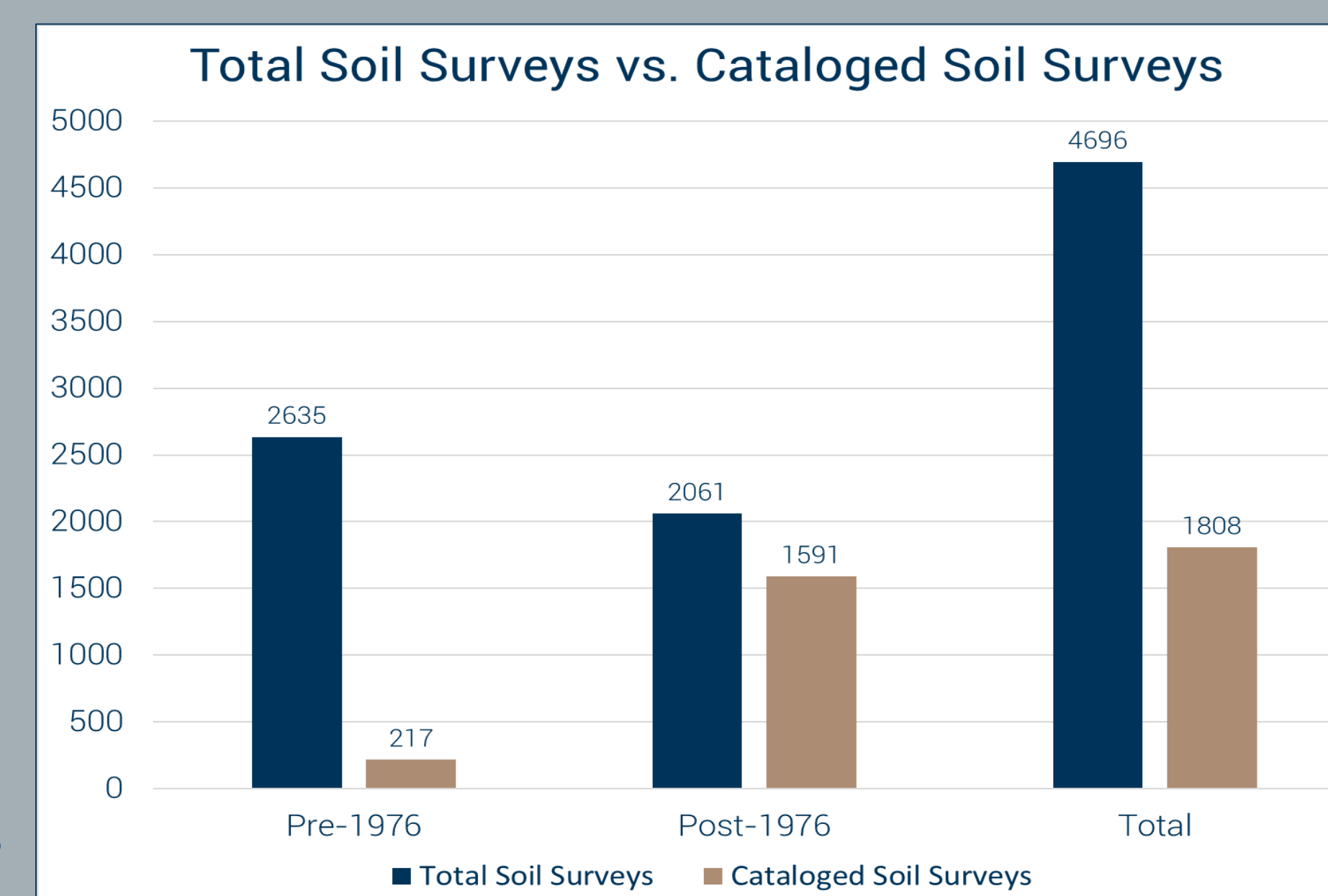
Catalog of Government Publications (CGP) – GPO's national finding tool for government publications. Regularly updated since July 1976. Pre-1976 items are added irregularly through various projects (i.e. HS).

Challenges to Accessing the Soil Surveys

Discoverability

At present, the entire Soil Survey collection is accessed via a bound paper finding aid. It lists 4,598 soil surveys by state, date, and SuDoc. The binder is passively available and requires visiting the stacks for discovery. It is difficult to update this inventory.

The collection was not cataloged and relied on commercial indexes through 1968. The library has utilized MARC batch uploads to catalog post-1976 documents. Post-1976 surveys are more robustly cataloged, but gaps remain, and quality checks are necessary. 1808 soil surveys are cataloged.



SuDoc Stem	Dates Covered	Used at USU
A 26.5	1899-1927	Yes, until 1954
A 47.5	1927-1938	No
A 1.64/1,2	?	No
A 19.31	1938-1942	No
A 57.38	1899-	Yes, 1955-current
A 77.514	1953?-Discontinued	No (included in HS records)

(Batten, 2017)

The HS project includes pre-1976 soil surveys that could be batch uploaded. However, previous USU binding decisions have complicated this opportunity. Like other Gov Docs, Soil Surveys have had a variety of SuDocs over time. At USU, soil surveys continued to be bound under SuDoc stem A 26.5 for 17 years after the SuDoc changed.

As a result, items cataloged nationally via the HS and the CGP have different SuDocs than USU. In a comparison of Nov. 2017 records from the HS project, 95% of surveys from 1942-1953 require an edited SuDoc.

Digitization

NRCS has digitized almost all soil surveys and organized them by state. They provide free and open access through their website. **However, these electronic resources are not linked to FDLP records and metadata is limited.** PURLs are not present in the CGP. A possible process would have GPO add PURLs to their soil survey records, which would then be distributed through MARC or HS downloads.

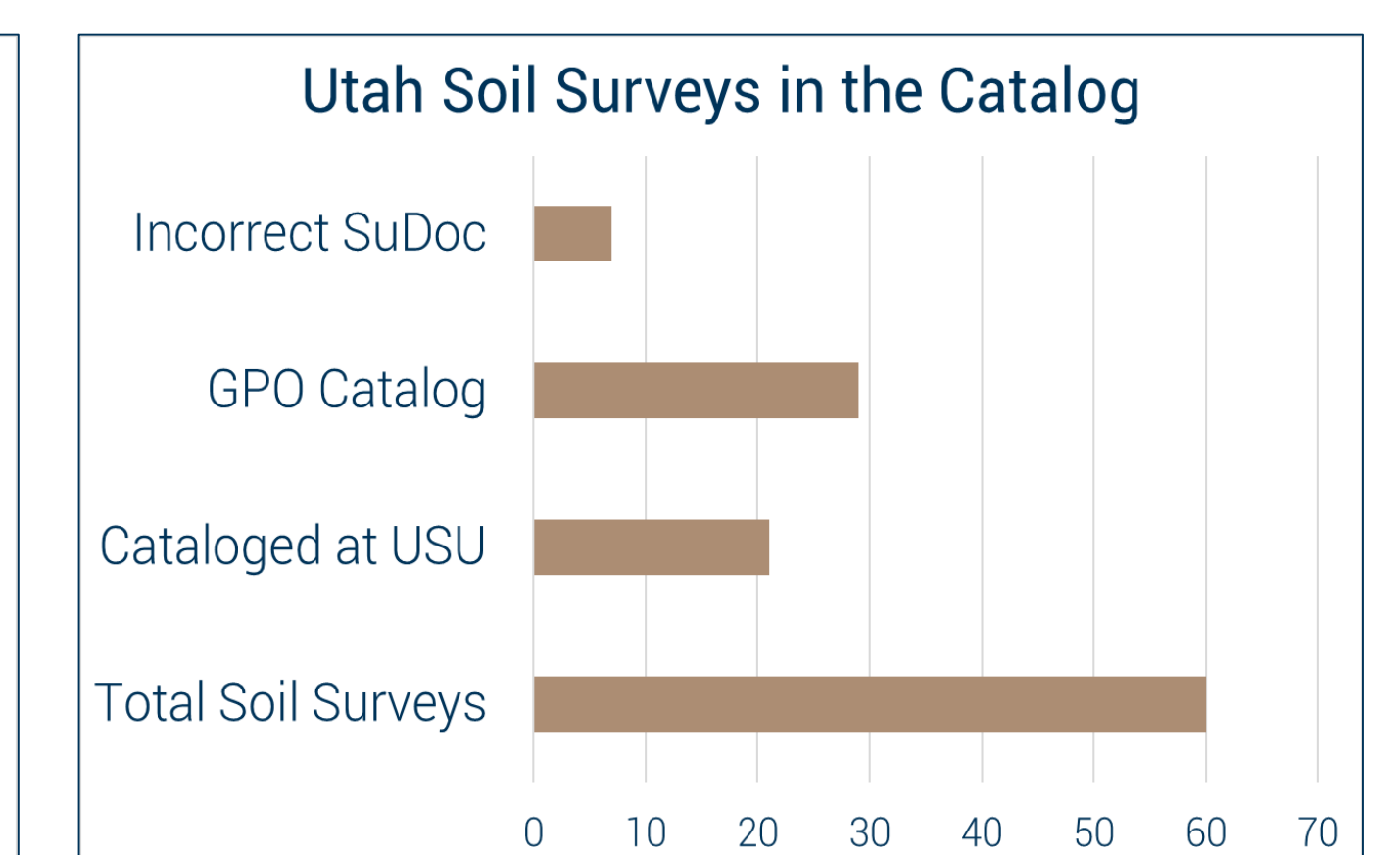
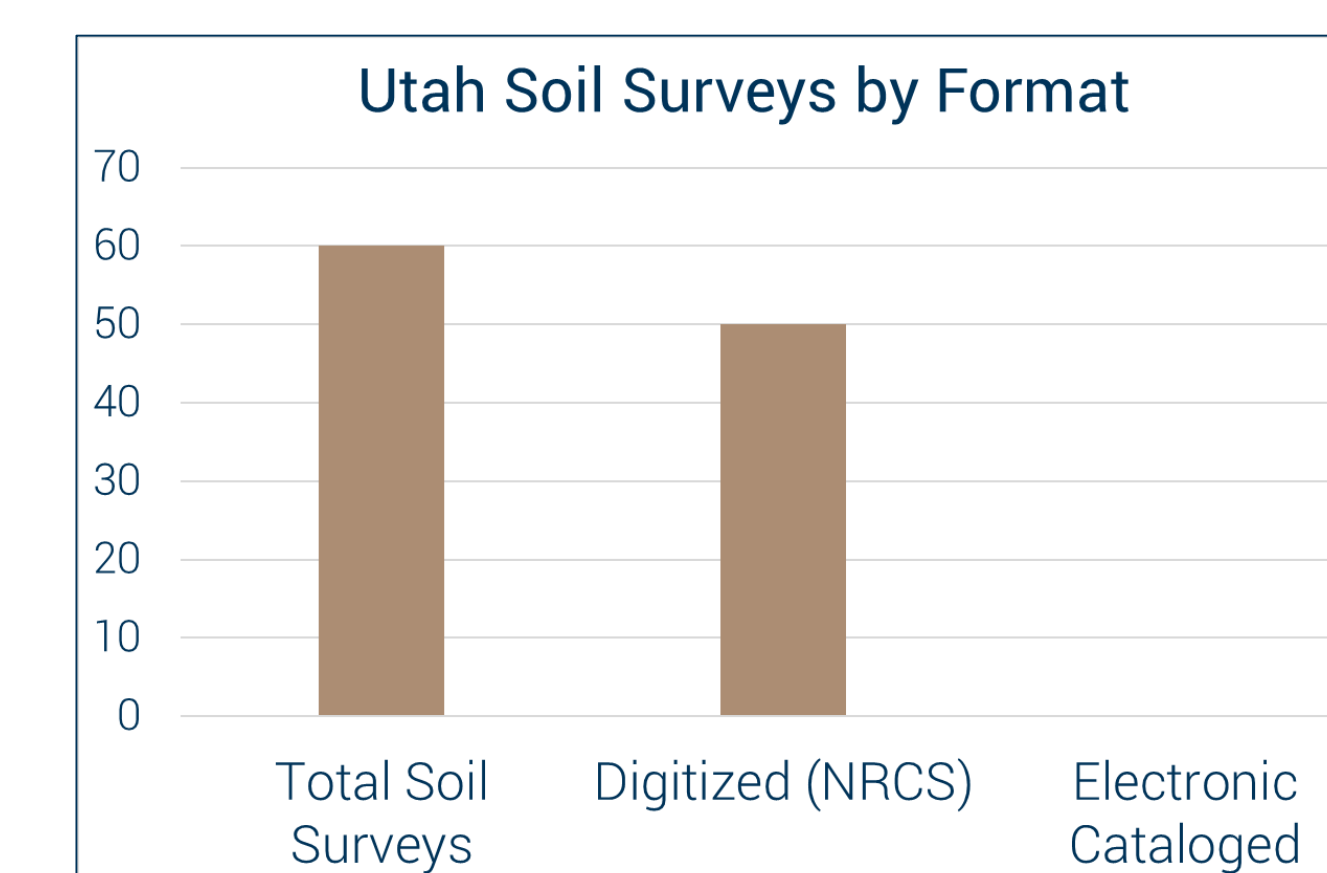
Reference List

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Soil Surveys in USU Collections

This project's purpose is to identify, describe, improve discoverability, and promote Soil Surveys at our Land Grant Institution. Soil surveys are a distinct historic collection of materials from the USDA. According to Richard Arnold, Senior Soil Scientist, "The mission of the soil survey has always been to help others understand soils" (1999). The Surveys cover U.S. states and select territories, dating from 1899 to 2008. Current data is hosted in an online data tool, Web Soil Survey 2.0.

USU users focus on Mountain West soils. Examining the Utah surveys, we found that overarching challenges are present even in the surveys most likely to be requested by users. No electronic versions are cataloged and SuDoc inconsistencies are present. Less than half of the Utah surveys are cataloged.



Next Steps

Discoverability & Electronic copies

- Improve cataloging workflows to address significant deficit in pre-1976 surveys
- Prioritize cataloging Mountain West surveys
- Utilize HS downloads for non-Utah/Idaho materials, with an adapted workflow to address SuDoc differences
- Retain A 26.5 SuDocs to avoid disbinding and shifting
- Identify Idaho & Utah surveys for PURLs to GPO

Promotion

- Exhibit featuring soil surveys
- Develop LibGuide
- Direct outreach to departments:
 - Plants, Soils, & Climatology
 - Civil Engineering
 - Landscape Architecture & Environmental Planning
 - Extension

