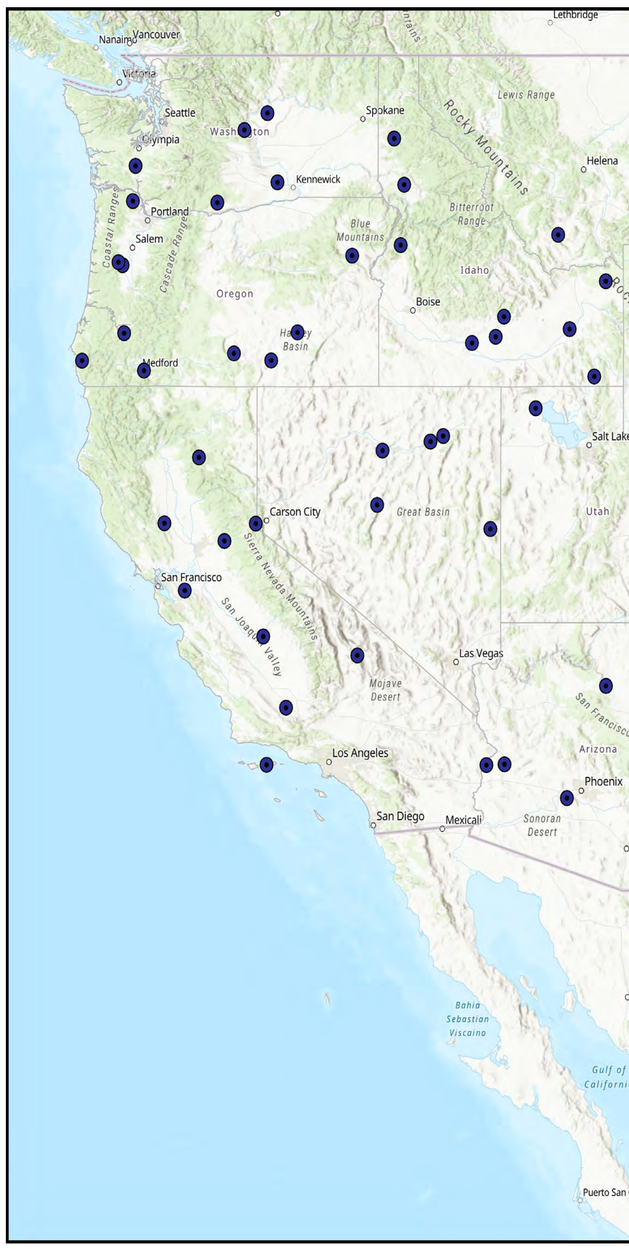
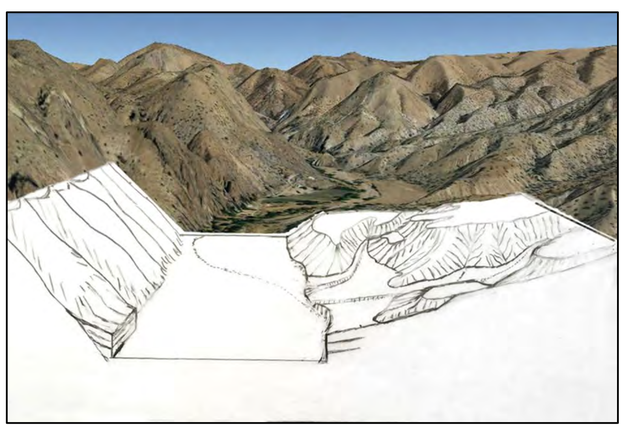
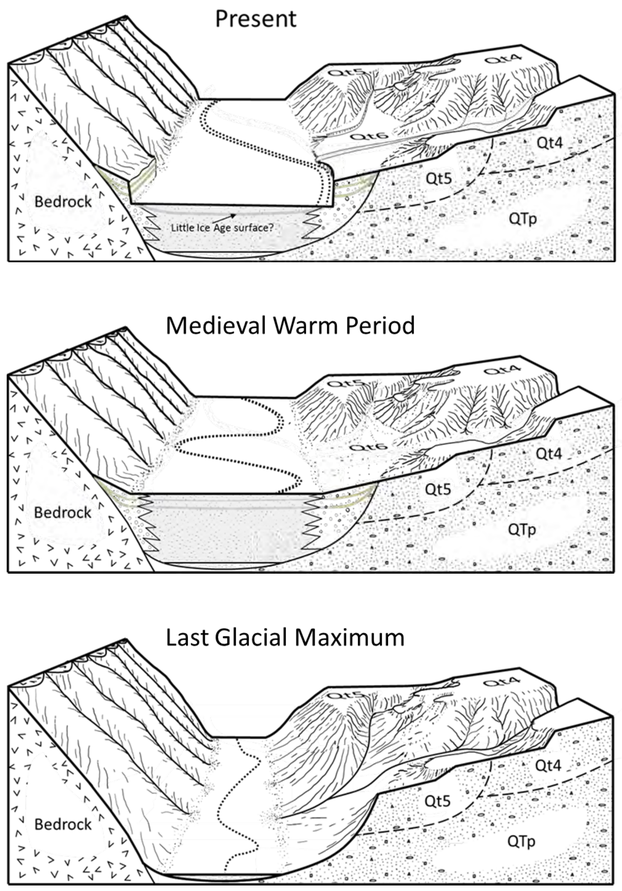
United States Department of Agriculture

Map of the Month

January







Block Diagrams—Simple Lines, Complex Landscapes

Block diagrams reduce the innumerable details of a crowded landscape to a relatively few simple lines. As such, they are very effective for communicating how and why soils differ from one place to another. Not only can block diagrams show current soil patterns, they can also show changes in soil patterns over time. For example, climate cycles over hundreds and thousands of years can have a major impact on bottomland soils, as shown by the sequence of block diagrams from the present to the last glacial maximum about 20,000 years ago.

Block diagrams have been a routine part of the USDA soil survey program because they work so well for communicating soil patterns. Their use was especially widespread in the soil surveys of the 1970s, ‘80s, and ‘90s. During that era, professional illustrators employed by USDA worked with soil scientists to create the block diagrams. Currently, over 3,000 block diagrams are available online, as shown by the blue dots on the map above. The diagrams are housed on the website of the National Soil Survey Center and can be found by entering “Locator Map for Block Diagrams, NRCS Soils” in a search engine.