

A Garden... or a Desert?

The Lewis and Clark Expedition's Assessment of the West

Was the West a garden or a desert? In 1803, President Jefferson commissioned Lewis and Clark to report on the Western lands of the Louisiana Purchase, particularly their potential for agricultural purposes.

NRCS was created in the 20th Century and addresses similar interests. Lewis and Clark described soils based on the kinds of plants and animals they would support, as well as other qualities and properties. NRCS soil scientists use similar descriptions today.

Jefferson's charge to Lewis and Clark reflected the need of our young nation to know and understand its natural resources. Today, NRCS helps people conserve, maintain, and improve our natural resources and environment through local, state, and national partnerships.



"All those parts of the hills which was Clark of Ossa really dissected and washed into the river and bottom, and these hills under which the river ran, slipped into it and dissolved and raised with the water of the river..."

William Clark—Chouteau, MO, September 14, 1804



"... a cloudy evening & snowing all Day from the breaking of the plains, which was seen on the by the Missourians for an early crop of Oats, as an encouragement for the Missourians to feed on."

William Clark—Pt. Mandan, ND, October 24, 1804

Below are one of a series of historical paintings commemorating the 150th anniversary of the Lewis and Clark Expedition. All were created using natural soil pigments by NRCS employee Jan Long.



Below: List of soils used by Lewis and Clark, with examples—a *tabularia* in its natural soil & a *receptus*.



Example soil profile made at Missouri by NRCS personnel, as seen in the photos at left.