

Creating map legends with WRB

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Maps require generalization. This is independent of scale. The World Reference Base for Soil Resources (WRB) uses the following levels for soil maps: First level: Reference Soil Groups (RSGs) only; second level: RSGs plus the first applying principal qualifier; third level: RSGs plus the first two applying principal qualifiers; fourth level: RSGs plus the first three applying principal qualifiers. Supplementary qualifiers are neglected. In most cases, also some principal qualifiers are neglected, even at the fourth scale level, because many soils have more than three principal qualifiers. On the one hand, these rules are important, because they guarantee that all over the world soil maps are made according to the same system. But on the other hand, there may be an unacceptable loss of information, if some of the neglected qualifiers are important. WRB has a backdoor for that, called 'optional qualifiers'. The WRB rules for map legends allow adding any qualifier in brackets after the name of the RSG.

This presentation will explore the possibilities of optional qualifiers. They may be important for detecting soil functions or threats to soils. But they may also be important to obtain a comprehensive picture of the landscape, to describe the stage of soil formation and to understand lateral processes.