

Scientists sample soil in the Smokies

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Scientists say they plan a soil study in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park next spring to determine levels of nutrient loss and acid accumulation.

The researchers say they will take soil samples from four sites above 4,000 feet, where acid rain and polluted cloud water cause some of the worst acid deposition problems in the Smokies.

The study -- funded in part by a \$10,000 grant from the Alcoa Foundation -- will target sites examined by the Environmental Protection Agency in the 1980s. The results will enable scientists to determine how the soils have changed.

"We have been studying the effects of acid deposition on streams, and now we're looking at soils," said Michael Jenkins, forest ecologist at the park's headquarters in Gatlinburg, Tenn.

Scientists will dig to bedrock at four high-elevation sites located on the Tennessee and North Carolina sides of the 500,000-acre park.

Jenkins said that top layer of soil contains more organisms than anywhere in the forest.

"Changes in the soil chemistry have a cascading effect that impacts the plants and trees -- and ultimately the animals that rely on them," Jenkins said.

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