



A note from the Administrator's Desk

Everyone at the Conservation District would like to thank our supporters, volunteers and partners for another very successful year in 2008. In 2008, the District focused on strengthening existing programs and services offered and extending the reach of the District with increased community awareness.

Watershed Workshop Series

Our watershed workshop series continued from 2007 with a spring workshop about creating and maintaining Rain Gardens. Someone who attended the rain garden workshop left a comment on their evaluation form that suggested we teach folks how to use rain barrels to conserve water and reduce runoff. We took that idea and ran with it; 3 workshops and over 75 rain barrels later we have the beginnings of a small rain barrel craze! We are planning more rain barrel workshops in 2009, as they are a great way for folks to save some money while they help the environment. Oh, and they are REALLY easy to make! Another piece of the watershed workshop series was the 2008 Farming for the Future conference. The 2007 conference was such a success that we decided to do it again! Topics at the 2008 conference was held on November 18 and included topics such as Entrepreneurial Agriculture, Profitable Pasture Management, Land Preservation Options, Water Quality Protection, Michigan Right to Farm Laws, Farm Marketing Tips & Tools, Energy Conservation, Farm Bill Programs and more! With over 50 attendees, the 2008 conference was a huge success. We are looking forward to holding the conference again in 2009!

Land Preservation Board

In March of 2008, the Conservation District formed a partnership with Van Buren County to provide administrative support to the Land Preservation Board. The partnership has strengthened the involvement of the Conservation District in local land preservation efforts and we look forward to working with the County and the Land Preservation Board again in 2009.

As you read through this report, please remember that we would not be where we are today without the support people like you!

Thank You!

Finances

FY 2008

REVENUES

Federal Grants	\$ 50,806.00
State Grants	\$ 63,302.50
Local Contributions & Grants	\$ 2,300.00
Charges for Services	\$ 4,958.00
Interest & Rentals	\$ 26,213.50
Other Revenues	\$ 45,111.66
Tree Sales	\$ 27,043.80
Total Revenue & Other Sources	\$ 219,735.46

EXPENDITURES

281 Operations	\$ 66,381.99
282 Groundwater	\$ 35,903.06
283 CTAI	\$ 46,362.37
290 Black River Watershed	\$ 50,806.00

294 Reforestation \$ 18,640.20

Total Expenditures & Other Uses \$ 218,093.62

Net Revenues (Expenditures) \$ 1,641.84

Beginning Fund Balance

Ending Fund Balance \$ 1,641.84

Special Contributions

A very special thank you to all those who made donations to the Conservation District

- over the past year!**
 John Bommerschein
 Cathy Brockington
 Kay Caskey
 Mark Cluster
 Marcy Colclough
 Curt Dowd
 Deb Fisher
 Suzann Flowers
 Thomas Jaslowski
 T.R. Jassen
 Bradford Johnson
 Bill Lucking
 Kelly Lynk
 Neil McFadden
 Sandy Milroy
 Connie Myres
 Catherine Niessink
 Lynwood Topp

We would also like to thank the Sauk Trails Resource, Conservation & Development for their contributions to our projects in 2008.



Putting the finishing touches on rain barrels at the "Build Your Own Rain Barrel" workshops in May & June 2008



*Michigan Groundwater Stewardship Program
 Kyle Mead, Groundwater Technician*

The goal of the Michigan Groundwater Stewardship Program is to offer free, confidential, and non-regulatory farm assessments to assist farmers in complying with State and Federal Laws and Michigan Right to Farm Guidelines. Farm*A*Systs are an assessment that assesses practices done at the Farm/Homestead, practices such as Fertilizer Storage, Fuel Storage, Pesticide Storage and Well Isolation. A Crop*A*Syst works the same as a Farm*A*Syst in that there are Assessment Questions pertaining to specific practices only the Crop*A*Syst covers practices done in the field.

- **Farm*A*Systs completed in FY 2008 – 18**
- **Crop*A*Systs completed in FY2008 – 9**

Practices found with the potential to cause adverse environmental impact are logged in the Farm*A*Syst or Crop*A*Syst as a 'to-do list' for the producer and Groundwater Tech to complete. When a potential impact is reduced it is known as a Risk Reduction. Risk Reductions can be the closing an un-used well, pouring a concrete pad for the transfer of fuels, or erecting a building designed specifically for fertilizer and pesticide storage.

- **Risk Reductions completed in FY 2008 – 178**

Once a Farm has completed a Farm*A*Syst or a Crop*A*Syst, evaluated and reduced all risks on their farm they can then become MAEAP (Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program) Verified by the Michigan Department of Agriculture. A MAEAP Verification is recognition from the State that all practices, procedures and operations done on the farm are environmentally sound and according to Michigan's Generally Accepted Agricultural Practices (GAAMPS). Producers obtaining this Verification may choose to post a sign at their farm site to let friends, neighbors, & customers know that environmental stewardship is important to the farm owners and operators.

- **MAEAP Verifications completed in FY 2008 – 5**
 - Farmstead System Verifications – 3
 - Cropping System Verifications – 2

New to the Michigan Groundwater Program this year was a Technician specialization program. Each Groundwater Technician will choose a specialization area, allowing other technicians and producers on a regional level to call on that technician for specific questions in their area of expertise. Kyle opted to specialize in the irrigation and small fruit program areas due to the high need for this area of expertise in Van Buren & Allegan County program area.

Congratulations to the following farms for becoming MAEAP verified in 2008!

*Alaga Farm
 Steve & Anita Friend
 Leduc Blueberries, LLC
 Rob Vanderswag*



*Black River Watershed Project
Erin Fuller, Watershed Coordinator*

The Black River Watershed Project is nearing the end of a three-year grant project to implement portions of the Black River Watershed Management Plan. The Van Buren Conservation District oversaw the creation of the plan which was completed in 2005. The three main focus areas of the project are 1) reducing polluted runoff to the Black River, 2) outreach and education, and 3) land use planning and land protection.

Highlights of the past year have included:

- Completing a rain garden installation project in Bloomingdale
- Writing and distributing watershed newsletters and brochures; updating project website
- Meeting with local officials and organizations to increase community awareness of the project
- Coordinating educational workshops for local decision makers and residents such as “Landscaping for Water Quality: Rain Gardens” and “Building Your Own Rain Barrel”
- Working with the Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy and a volunteer Land Protection Team to highlight properties for conservation in the watershed
- Holding landowner outreach events to connect with landowners and discuss land conservation options
- Working with other organizations and individuals to develop a long-term strategy for water quality conservation in southwest Michigan
- Working with volunteers to complete water quality sampling
- Working with the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission to review master plans and zoning ordinances to help communities plan for long term water quality protection

Thank You!!

Over 1300 hours of volunteer time were donated to the Black River Watershed Project in 2008. When combined with other donations of cash and materials, a total of \$48,932.13 of local match was donated to this project in 2008!



*Farm marketing
Tips & Tools
session at
2008 Farming
for the Future
Conference at
the Van Buren
Conference
Center in
Lawrence.
-Gerah
Dutkiewicz,
speaker*



Tree, Shrub & Native Plant Sales

Tree, shrub and native plant sales help to provide valuable funding for Conservation District programs as well as support the mission of the Conservation District by providing trees, shrubs and native plants for conservation.

Through the tree and shrub seedling sale in April of 2008, over 30,150 trees and shrubs went out the door to approximately 250 customers!

The trees and shrubs sold through our sales are typically used for projects within Van Buren County such as windbreaks, buffers, wildlife plantings, reforestation & stream stabilizations as well as landscaping & beautification!

In June, we sold over 2,730 native perennials to about 65 customers!

In September, we sold over 600 native perennials to about 20 customers.

Native plants are often used for rain gardens and wildlife plantings as well as landscaping. Native perennials are rapidly gaining in popularity as an alternative to higher maintenance cultivars. Since native plants have adapted to Michigan's unique soils and climate, they often times require less water and fertilization, and are generally lower maintenance once established.

Our July Native Plant Workshop was full to the brim with folks eager to learn about using native plants in their landscaping efforts. 38 people packed into the District's small conference room to hear a presentation by Vern Stephens, owner of Designs by Nature. Vern is also the District's grower for the spring and fall native perennial sales.



To everyone who purchased trees, shrubs or native plants at our spring and fall sales and to all the volunteers who help make the sales such a success!

Thank you!

Get Involved!

If you would like to volunteer to help out with the tree or native plant sales, please call (269)657-4030 ext. 5 or e-mail Amy at: amy.lockhart@mi.nacdnet.net
Your help will be greatly appreciated!



Each year, the Conservation District works directly with the USDA- Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to administer Federal farm bill programs such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP). These programs not only offer valuable technical assistance to Van Buren County farmers and landowners, helping them become better stewards of the land, but these programs also contribute to the local economy by bringing in federal dollars to fund conservation practices. This money has a direct impact on the success of local farms, businesses and contractors. The figures below represent the federal cost share dollars brought into Van Buren County as a result of this partnership and the farm bill programs.

Program	Number of 2008 contracts	Acres contracted	Obligated funds
Environmental Quality Incentives Program	29	2,396.20	1,119,345.42
Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program	2	43.4	23,714.50
Conservation Reserve Program	22	628.6	46,436.00

Total amount of farm bill program funding obligated to Van Buren County landowners in 2008: **\$1,189,495.92**

The **Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)** is by far the most popular farm bill program in Van Buren County. Since FY2004, over **\$4.2 Million** dollars of federal funding has been allocated to Van Buren County landowners through the EQIP program alone.

Some of the more common practices funded through the EQIP program include (but not limited to):

- Irrigation Water Management
- Pest and Nutrient Management
- Agrichemical Containment Facility
- Cover Crops
- Heavy Use Area Protection
- Prescribed Grazing
- Grade Stabilization Structure
- Windbreak/Shelterbelt Establishment
- Invasive Species control/removal
- Stream Crossing

