



Your Land, Your Water
YOUR MICHIGAN

Conservation Conversation

If a year is judged by accomplishments and success; the year 2009 was a great year.

Kyle Mead our Groundwater Technician for the Michigan Groundwater Stewardship Program is all over the county performing Farm*A*Systs, scheduling irrigation, distributing spill kits and helping farms become MAEAP verified. Kyle completed his fifth year of service here at the Conservation District and was presented with a plaque for Most Contribution Deliverables in 2009 in the state of Michigan.

The District was pleased to hire Matt Meersman as the Conservation Technical Assistant Initiative (CTAI) Technician. He has brought his expertise in watershed management as he wrote the Paw Paw Watershed Plan for the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission. Matt assisted Van Buren's Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) on numerous field visits, worked with farmers engineering practices and nutrient management plans.

The District wrapped up the Black River Watershed Grant. Erin Fuller worked for three years on the implementation of projects from the Black River Management Plan. The projects were a success; two rain gardens, stream bank stabilizations, a recreational access site, eleven workshops, and numerous people made aware and educated about water quality issues.

As they say when one door closes another one opens; Erin is going to continue on board for her seventh year here at the District along with Matt as the Watershed Coordinators for Van Buren's new 319 grant from the Department of Environmental Quality for Paw Paw and Black River Wetland Restoration projects. Erin spent many long hard hours writing this grant that will focus on protecting over 440 acres of wetlands and 220 acres of associated uplands, and restoring 100 acres of wetlands. The grant will also provide education and outreach on wetland issues and importance to residents in our county.

As our world is in constant motion and change so is the Conservation District. Many new faces can be found here at the District. Kim Sinclair has brought a wealth of knowledge as she joined the District in the spring as our new Administrator. Kim comes to us from Hartford where she also works part-time at her family's printing company, Sinclair Graphics. Amy Lockhart said farewell with love and ventured overseas for a new chapter in her life as AJ Brucks slid in to takeover as the new Executive Director.

As the year has come to an end, another decade has passed, 2010 brings great opportunity to those in Van Buren County. The District has many plans for the upcoming months; projects, events, educational workshops, and sales that you will not want to miss.

Finances

FY 2009

REVENUES

| | |
|--|----------------------|
| Federal Grants | \$ 116,983.47 |
| State Grants | \$ 85,313.39 |
| Local Contributions & Grants | \$ 8,271.00 |
| Charges for Services | \$ 6,389.00 |
| Interest & Rentals | \$ 27,008.84 |
| Other Revenues | \$ 44,150.88 |
| Reforestation | \$ 13,735.93 |
| Total Revenue & Other Sources | \$ 301,852.51 |

EXPENDITURES

| | |
|--|----------------------|
| 281 Operations | \$ 95,512.62 |
| 282 Groundwater | \$ 53,540.36 |
| 283 CTAI | \$ 31,260.47 |
| 290 Black River Watershed | \$ 92,897.23 |
| | |
| 294 Reforestation | \$ 6254.60 |
| | |
| Total Expenditures & Other Uses | \$ 279,465.28 |
| | |
| Net Revenues | \$ 5,312.53 |
| | |
| Beginning Fund Balance | \$ 311,354.80 |
| | |
| Ending Fund Balance | \$ 356,530.12 |

*Finances based on unaudited figures



Michigan shoreline is a showcase for 275,000 acres of sand dune formations. The windswept dunes gracing Michigan's Great Lakes shoreline represent the largest collection of freshwater dunes in the world. Michigan dunes are home to five federally listed threatened and endangered species. The diversity of environmental elements wildlife, topographic relief, vegetation, habitats, and climatic conditions occurring within these landforms represent a phenomenon unique to the State of Michigan.

The Van Buren Conservation District reviewed 10 application permits for uses in critical dune areas in 2009. Protection of Michigan's Critical Dunes is a priority to Conservation Districts.

2009 Board of Directors

Bryan Cronenwett, Chair
Carl Druskovich, Vice Chair
Shirley Bush, Treasurer
Jan Petersen, Secretary
Mike Rainey, Member

Special Thanks

A very special thanks to our Board for taking the time and energy to support the Van Buren Conservation District.

Thank you to all those who made donations and volunteered their time in support of the Conservation District over the past year!

Highlighted Facts!

- 273 hours volunteered
- 2000 educated youth
- 2140 educated adults

Equipment Rentals



Fourteen farmers and 220 acres later the Brillion Seeder has traveled all over our county.



Kyle Mead has dedicated his last five years to the District as he serves as the Groundwater Technician for the Michigan Groundwater Stewardship Program, a grant through the Michigan Department of Agriculture (MDA). He is a specialist in Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP), irrigation, and small fruit. Kyle is also a member of Michiana Irrigation Association.

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 evaluate 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 2009 – 8**
- **Crop*A*Systs completed in FY 2009 – 6**
- **Grape*A*Systs completed in FY 2009 – 2**
- **Livestock*A*Systs completed in FY 2009 – 1**

Practices found with the potential to cause adverse environmental impacts 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 2009 – 98**

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 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 2009 – 3**
 - Farmstead System Verifications – 2
 - Cropping System Verifications – 1



Congratulations to the three farms for becoming MAEAP verified in 2009!

The Groundwater Technician also works closely with the Van Buren County Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS). Contribution Agreement Work with NRCS consists of completing Nutrient Management Plan, Pest Management Plan and Irrigation Water Management Plans.

- **Contribution Agreements completed in FY 2009 – 37**



*Black River Watershed Project
Erin Fuller, Watershed Coordinator*

Black River Watershed Project Grant Completed!

Erin Fuller dedicated the last three years to the Black River Watershed Project. This is her second accomplished grant for the district. Prior to this grant she worked for three years on the Black River Watershed Plan.

The Black River Watershed encompasses approximately 287 square miles in Allegan and Van Buren Counties. The Black River flows into Lake Michigan at South Haven. The overarching goal of this project was to implement holistic long-term protection and improvements to water quality in the Black River Watershed. The three primary objectives to achieve this goal were:

| |
|-----------------------------------|
| Grant Amount: \$360,089.83 |
| Match Funds: \$141,198.92 |
| <hr/> |
| Total Amount: \$501,288.75 |

- Implement Best Management Practices in two high-visibility public locations
- Provide information and education on water quality issues for watershed residents, municipalities and businesses
- Provide long term protection of the Black River Watershed through improved local land use policies and land protection

Best Management Practices:

- 1 recreational access site installed
- 1 culvert replaced
- 16,953 sq. ft. of porous parking surface installed
- 2 rain gardens installed (5277 cu. ft)
- 1325 linear ft. of streambank stabilized

Annual Load Reductions:

- 71.96 tons of sediment
- 85.12 lbs of phosphorus
- 290.05 lbs of nitrogen

I&E Activities:

- Wrote and distributed watershed newsletters
- Held 11 watershed workshops
- Held 2 Municipal summits
- Marked storm drains in 3 communities
- Maintained project website
- Developed Information & Education Plan
- Assisted 4 communities with land use planning
- Developed conservation planning models

Partners involved:

- *Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy
- *Southwest Michigan Planning Commission
- *MSU Extension
- *Two Rivers Coalition
- *Van Buren County Drain Commissioner
- *City of Bangor
- *Bloomingdale Township and Village
- ...and many more!



Picture on the left; Lion's Park, Bangor: Riverbanks were re-graded and replanted with native vegetation. A raingarden was installed to filter stormwater.

Picture on the right; Shady Brook Park, Bloomingdale: BMPs installed at this site included a raingarden, tree revetments, crushed concrete resurfacing of the parking areas, and a public access.



*Conservation Technical Assistance Initiative
Matt Meersman, Technician*

Matt Meersman joined the District in October 2008, after working for the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission where he wrote the Paw Paw Watershed Plan . He is involved in many watershed projects and organizations including Friends of the St. Joe and Two Rivers Coalition.

Conservation Technical Assistance Initiative (CTAI) positions work is performed under the technical guidance of the NRCS District Conservationist. The Technician focus on practice implementation and construction inspection. The position has responsibility to work with individuals in the agricultural community to implement a variety of agricultural practices that are funded under the 2002 and 2008 Farm Bill. These practices include, but are not limited to, pest management, nutrient management, prescribed grazing, irrigation water management, tree and shrub establishment, agrichemical containment facilities, fencing and heavy use area protection (HUAP's).

CTAI's design conservation practices and inspect the practice during construction and after completion. The CTAI makes sure the practice is installed according to designs and specifications.

Picture: CTAI inspecting HUAP practice.

Inspection includes:

- 1.Practice installed where indicated
- 2.Appropriate materials were used to construct practice
- 3.Proper quantity and placement of material
- 4.Over all function of practice meets intended purpose





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), Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) and the new Agriculture Water Enhancement Program (AWEP) that funds projects specifically in our small region. 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.

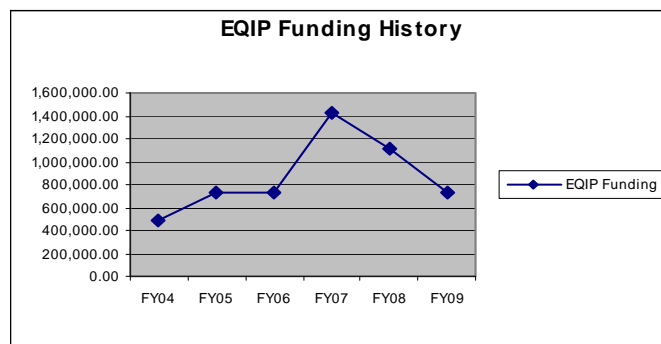
| Program | Number of 2009 contracts | Acres contracted | Obligated funds |
|--|--------------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| Environmental Quality Incentives Program | 11 | 393.10 | \$737,673.92 |
| Agriculture Water Enhancement Program | 3 | 416.50 | \$235,740.00 |
| Total | 14 | 809.60 | \$973,413.92 |

Total amount of farm bill program funding obligated to Van Buren County landowners in 2009: **\$973,413.92**

The **Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)** is by far the most popular farm bill program in Van Buren County. Since FY2004, over **\$5 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





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 2009, over 23,500 trees and shrubs went out the door to approximately 136 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!

June's Spring Native Plant Sale sold over 650 native perennials and the Fall Native Plant Sale in September sold over 150 native perennials totaling over 800 plants to about 120 customers.

Native plants are often used for rain gardens, wildlife plantings, and 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 Native Plant Workshop in May was full to the brim with folks eager to learn about using native plants in their landscaping efforts. People packed into the District's conference room to hear a presentation by Vern Stephens, owner of Designs by Nature.



THANK YOU to staff and volunteers that helped prepare thousands of trees for our annual seedling sale.



Protecting & Promoting Our Natural Resources

Conservation Education

Farming for the Future



Keith Thompson, Channel 3 News and Kim Sinclair, VB CD Administrator

The third annual "Farming for the Future" was held once again at the Conference Center in Lawrence. The all day event had a great line up of presenters who brought a wealth of knowledge about our on going Watershed Projects, MAEAP verification, Cost Share Programs through NRCS, Irrigation Scheduling, Business Planning, Weather Patterns and Farmers Almanac, Tractor Performance, Organic Farming, Composting, Grazing, Backyard Farming, Farm Marketing, Bees in the Backyard and a Farm Visit. The day was a success with 13 presenters and almost 75 participants from Van Buren and surrounding counties. "I can't believe I am just discovering these

programs!" was the comment from one of the participants, "A day well spent" from another. Presenters shared their stories and information as the wheels in the participants heads ran wild as they planned for implementation on their farm and how far they wanted to take all the beneficial information.



Participants on the November 12, Farming for the Future event at the Van Buren Conference Center

Building Rain Barrel



Erin Fuller, VB CD Watershed Coordinator, helps a resident build his rain barrel.

The Van Buren Conservation District had a "Build Your Own Rain Barrel" workshop in May. The workshop was held at the Southwest Michigan College, South Haven campus. Fifteen barrels were purchased and built. If all of these participants put their rain barrels to use they would have collected hundreds of gallons of rain in the past year. Rain water that is

reusable and diverted from runoff into drains and waterways. Normally, when it rains, water runs off of your roof into your gutters and eventually into the storm drain system. Once it stops raining, that water is no longer available. Rain barrels are an ideal way homeowners can conserve water by collecting rain water and then reusing it for watering flowers, gardens and lawns, particularly in time of drought. Rain barrels are also a great way to help protect our local waterways from polluted storm water runoff.

2009 Expos, Festivals and Fairs

The District exhibits:

- *Garden & Landscape Expo, American Red Cross, Lawrence
- *Fish Fest, Wolf Lake Fish Hatchery, Mattawan
- *Van Buren County Youth Fair, Hartford

Van Buren Groundwater Stewardship Program exhibits:

- *Ag. Action Day, KVCC
- *Envirothon, Michigan State University
- *Horticulture Day, Lake Michigan College
- *Great Lakes Expo, Grand Rapids
- *Ag Action, Lansing



Supporting Local Food & Farms

Van Buren County 2007 Census of Agriculture from the USDA states that there are 1,232 farms consisting of 185,343 acres across our county. The market value of products being sold from this land is \$173,472,000.

Van Buren County is ranked number one in the state for fruit, nut trees and berries and number three for vegetables, melons, potatoes and sweet potatoes.

Farmland land is a significant contributor to our local economy and well as it is to our food system. Buying local keeps your money in your community, it is not only beneficial to the farmer it is beneficial to your health.

The Van Buren Conservation District printed 3,150 guides in 2009 which reached the hands of many of our county residents and visitors. They were a hit!

The Van Buren Conservation District thanks you for your support and commitment to our community and natural resources.