



## Conservation Conversation

The Van Buren Conservation District is excited to announce they were awarded the 2010 "Conservation District of the Year" honor at the Michigan Association of Conservation Districts Convention.

It is easy to have outstanding accomplishments when you have an amazing staff and board. The employees at our District are not only knowledgeable in their positions but are also passionate and dedicated to protecting our county's natural resources. With only five board members and seven staff they were able to achieve a great deal in the year 2010.

The Van Buren Conservation District (VBCD) promotes the conservation of natural resources, provides educational programs and events, and is the gateway to Farm Bill programs and funding through a close partnership with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Other programs include the Michigan Water Stewardship Program, the Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP), and the Paw Paw and Black Rivers Wetland Protection and Restoration project. Project partners include The Nature Conservancy, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and Environment and the Michigan Department of Agriculture.

In 2010, VBCD provided NRCS with technical assistance and support that helped bring over 1.5 million dollars in Farm Bill funding to Van Buren County agricultural producers. Technicians worked with landowners on environmental risk reduction and best management practices, promoted the MAEAP program (a voluntary program that helps farms of all sizes prevent and minimize agricultural pollution risks) and worked to preserve existing wetlands and restore preexisting wetlands.

Over 25,000 trees were planted in Van Buren County in 2010 through VBCD's annual Tree Seedling Sale. The District also holds an annual Native Plant Sale which has resulted in the establishment of a variety of native habitat types in the county. Educational programs offered by the District included topics such as cover crops, rain barrels, best management practices on the farm, wetlands, and much more. Over 2,000 children and 1,300 adults were reached with the VBCD's programming in 2010. The VBCD also held a River Rescue clean-up event in August in which 77 volunteers picked up over 2,000 pounds of trash from 33 miles of shorelines and waterways throughout Van Buren County.

The VBCD was founded in 1944 with a mission to promote the conservation of natural resources through partnerships by providing public education, demonstrations and technical assistance while working together for future generations.

# Finances

**FY 2010**

## REVENUES

|  |                      |
|--|----------------------|
| Federal Grants                           | \$ 62,078.09         |
| State Grants                             | \$ 97,653.90         |
| Local Contributions & Grants             | \$ 23,882.38         |
| Charges for Services                     | \$ 9,997.66          |
| Interest & Rentals                       | \$ 24,808.82         |
| Other Revenues                           | \$ 37,478.66         |
| Reforestation                            | \$ 25,548.46         |
| <b>Total Revenue &amp; Other Sources</b> | <b>\$ 281,447.97</b> |

## EXPENDITURES

|  |                      |
|--|----------------------|
| 281 Operations                             | \$ 72,619.13         |
| 282 MWSP                                   | \$ 59,747.03         |
| 283 CTAI                                   | \$ 37,824.12         |
| 278 PPBWRP                                 | \$ 60,284.83         |
| 279 TNC                                    | \$ 21,265.32         |
| 294 Reforestation                          | \$ 3,577.55          |
| <b>Total Expenditures &amp; Other Uses</b> | <b>\$ 255,315.98</b> |

|                        |               |
|------------------------|---------------|
| Net Revenues           | \$ 6,989.86   |
| Beginning Fund Balance | \$ 386,637.77 |
| Ending Fund Balance    | \$ 393,627.63 |

**\*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 4 application permits for uses in critical dune areas in 2010. Protection of Michigan's Critical Dunes is a priority to Conservation Districts.

## 2010 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!

- 397 hours volunteered
- 1945 educated youth
- 1311 educated adults

## Equipment Rentals



Ten farmers and 185 acres later the Brillion Seeder has traveled all over our county.



Across 62 acres of land in our county two farmers used the Truax No-Till drill to plant.



*Michigan Groundwater Stewardship Program  
 Kyle Mead, Groundwater Technician*

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

The goal of the Michigan Water 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 2010 – 16**
- **Crop\*A\*Systs completed in FY 2010 – 8**
- **Orchard\*A\*Systs completed in FY 2010 — 6**
- **Grape\*A\*Systs completed in FY 2010 – 4**

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 Water Stewardship 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 2010 – 173**

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 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 2010 –**
  - Farmstead System Verifications – 3
  - Cropping System Verifications – 3



*Congratulations to the farms for becoming MAEAP verified in 2010!*

The Water Stewardship Technician also works closely with the Van Buren and Allegan 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 2010 – 20**



*Conservation Technical Assistance Initiative  
Mike Wozniak, Conservation Technician*

Mike Wozniak joined the District in January 2010, after graduating from Michigan State University with a BS in Biosystems Engineering and completing his Fundamentals in Engineering exam.

Conservation Technical Assistance Initiative (CTAI) positions work is performed under the technical guidance of the NRCS District Conservationist. The Technician focuses on practice implementation, design 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 2008 Farm Bill to address a variety of conventional agricultural problems, questions or situations. These practices include, but are not limited to, pest, nutrient and irrigation management, prescribed grazing, tree and shrub establishment, agrichemical handling facilities, fencing, waste storage, grassed waterways, grade stabilization structures and heavy use area protection (HUAP's).

Provides on-site technical assistance for the implementation of conservation measures; completes surveys, designs, and layouts for construction of practices; inspects construction to determine adherence to specifications.

Picture above: CTAI inspecting Waste Storage Facility practice.

Inspection includes:

1. Practice installed where indicated
2. Appropriate materials were used to construct practice
3. Proper quantity and placement of material
4. Practice built to standards and specifications defined by NRCS
5. Over all function of practice meets intended purpose

Picture right: Retention pond for runoff in orchard area. Heavy eroding took place before stabilization.





*Agricultural Best Management Practice Program  
Paw Paw River Watershed  
Jared Foster, Conservation Technician*

Jared Foster has been working for the Conservation District since March of this year as a Conservation Technician. Jared's position is funded by a grant from The Nature Conservancy and Coca-cola and his goal is to increase groundwater recharge and improve overall water quality within the Paw Paw River watershed. Through education, outreach and conservation planning, several specific conservation practices are being promoted with funding for implementation through various Farm Bill programs. Developing this program nearly from scratch and finding ways to reach land users that might be interested in these practices has been a challenge, but Jared remains optimistic that producers will find good reason to adapt their current techniques to be even better land stewards. He hopes to add new tools and further develop the program to increase success in the future.

**BMPs and Potential Acreage as a result of BMP Outreach:**

- Wetland Restoration — 129 acres
- Conservation Cover & Cover Crops — 941 acres
- Conservation Tillage & No-Till — 968 acres
- Filter Strips — 11 acres/4 landowners

**Total Applications in process as of December, 2010:**  
10 applications in process for CSP, EQIP, CRP, WRP

**Estimated Potential Groundwater Recharge:**  
\*23,358,984 total gallons of water

**I&E Activities:**

- Distributed mailers to mass audience and individuals
- Hosted a No-Till & Cover Crops Workshop
- Presented at area Township meetings
- Assisted with Farming for the Future
- Marketed Truax No-Till Drill and Brillion Seeder
- Maintained related information on CD website
- Teamed with Drain Commission's "Buffer Program"
- BMP Field day w/ Coke and TNC representatives
- Made contact w/ many non-traditional ag land owners
- Assisted with NRCS conservation planning

**Partners involved:**

- \*The Nature Conservancy
- \*Coca-Cola
- \*Van Buren County Drain Commission
- \*Natural Resources Conservation Service



At Left: No-till soybeans with more than 90% residue coverage. Residue on surface helps to reduce erosion, hold moisture and build soil.

At Right: WRP restored wetland. The restoration and purchase of a permanent conservation easement were paid for by NRCS .





*Paw Paw and Black Rivers  
Wetland Protection & Restoration Project  
Erin Fuller and Matt Meersman, Watershed Coordinators*

The Van Buren Conservation District has been awarded a three-year \$806,000 grant from the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and Environment through the U.S. EPA Federal Clean Water Act. The grant will support a three year project focused on wetland protection and restoration. The project will build off the watershed management plans developed for the Paw Paw and Black River Watersheds. The project has three main focus areas:

- Wetland Protection: Grant funds will be used to permanently protect over 650 acres, 440 of which are existing wetlands.
- Wetland Restoration: At least 100 acres of land that has been drained in the past will be restored to wetland conditions.
- Outreach & Education: Brochures, newsletters and other outreach materials will be developed and distributed to educate landowners about the importance of preserving and restoring wetlands. A variety of workshops and field days will also be held.

|                                  |
|----------------------------------|
| <b>Grant Amount: \$806,551</b>   |
| <b>Match Funds: \$807,443</b>    |
| <hr/>                            |
| <b>Total Amount: \$1,613,994</b> |

- Activities**
- Permanently protect 650 acres, 440 acres of which are wetlands
  - Restore at least 100 acres of wetlands
  - Hold 6 workshops/fields days for landowners
  - Hold 2 workshops/field days for local officials
  - Identify highest priority wetlands for future protection
  - Identify highest priority areas for future wetland restoration
  - Identify pollutant sources in impaired waterbodies
  - Link landowners with appropriate programs to fund wetland restoration and protection

- Partners involved**
- Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy
  - Individual landowners
  - Two Rivers Coalition
  - Ducks Unlimited
  - Van Buren County Drain Commissioner
  - Sarett Nature Center
  - Van Buren Youth Camp
  - ...and many more!





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.

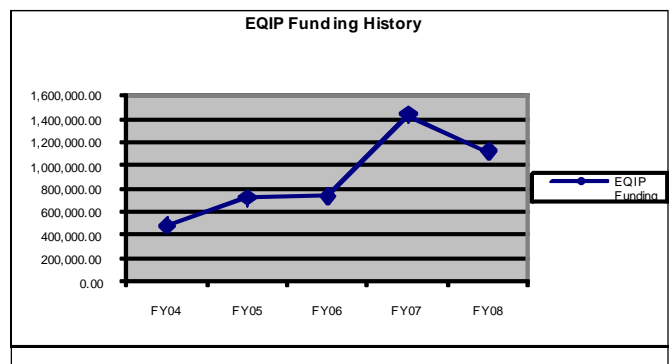
| Program                                  | Number of 2010 contracts | Acres contracted | Obligated funds |
|--|--------------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| Environmental Quality Incentives Program | 15                       | 1,165.90         | 735,936.59      |
| Agriculture Water Enhancement Program    | 10                       | 1,805            | 821,327.47      |
| Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program       | 1                        | 2.10             | 3,255.05        |
| Total                                    | 26                       | 2,973            | 1,560,519       |

Total amount of farm bill program funding obligated to Van Buren County landowners in 2010:

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 2010, over 25,300 trees and shrubs went out the door to approximately 208 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!

**Our Spring and Fall Native Plant Sale sold 560 quarts, 30 flats and 20 mixed garden flats of native perennials to about 92 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, VBCD 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



The Van Buren Conservation District's first ever "River Rescue" was a great success. We could not have done it without all of the supporting organizations, cities, townships and residents that devoted many hours of their time to help clean up our waterways.

With the help of 74 volunteers we were able to clean up over 1,700 pounds of trash and an additional 20 yard dumpster full. Over 400 tires, 4 couches, 2 bicycles, kitchen sink, construction barrel, food wrappers, bottles, cans, dolls and a bowling ball, among other items, were picked up out of 32 miles of water here in our Watersheds.

Supporting partners are the following: Two River Coalition, Berrien County Conservation District, Bangor /South Haven Heritage Water Trails Association, City of South Haven, City of Bangor, Hartford Township, City of Watervliet, Almena Township, Ickes Grading, American Rivers, Coca Cola, American Red Cross Van Buren Chapter, and local community residents in and around Van Buren and Berrien County.

What's in your watershed? Do you know of any illegal dump sites or trashy areas in or along our waterways? Please report them to the Van Buren Conservation District and they could be possible future clean up sites.



## Supporting Local Food & Farms

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 4,000 guides in 2010 which reached the hands of many of our county residents and visitors. Support your local farms and pick up a Farm Guide at the VBCD office.

### Rain Barrel Rally

Catching storm water runoff can be beneficial to the local waterways, your plants and gardens, and your pocket book.

Rain barrels are not a new idea, they have been used for generations to catch and reuse water on a later date. They also help local waterways by not adding to other runoff and picking up pollutants along the way. They are easy to build and easy to use. Van Buren Conservation District staff are ready to help when you join our rain barrel building workshops. We also sell rain barrel kits and ready to use barrels

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



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