

A photograph of a pond with several turtles. One turtle is in the foreground on a log, and two others are on a rock in the middle ground. The water is calm, reflecting the surrounding greenery and trees. The text 'Your Land Your Water Your Michigan' is overlaid in white on the top left.

# Your Land Your Water Your Michigan

2022 ANNUAL REPORT



# DEAR RESIDENTS & PARTNERS,



Kimberly Sinclair, Administrator

Cover Image: Painted turtles,  
Waverly Township

*Wow*, what a year the Van Buren Conservation District has had! Every time we think we have topped the charts, we smash another record, bringing more services and programs to Van Buren County. As you will see in this report, all of our programs excelled in the past year. Our award-winning staff continues to provide valuable services to our special corner of Michigan. Activities for the year doubled and tripled compared to years past, just take a look at our Recycling Program!

Before you dive into this annual report and see the amazing things we did in 2022, let's get to know the Van Buren Conservation District a bit more. Natural resources are our forests, water, land, and wildlife. Our health, environment, and economy are connected to our natural resources, which is what the Van Buren Conservation District does; conserve Van Buren County's natural resources. Our work in natural resource conservation comes in many forms: our Recycling Program, water health research and initiatives, managing invasive species, farm programs and services, and so much more.

We are so proud to bring these programs to our neighbors in Van Buren County. The work we do impacts our soil, water, and air. When we surveyed our community members, they said that's what they care about - drinking water, farming, and the health of our rivers, lakes, and streams. We all want to live in a place that values water, land, and people the way our community does and that is what we are here to do.

You might hear us be called by many names: the District, VBCD, the Conservation District, the Soil and Water Conservation District, and sometimes we are even referred to as "those folks." I hope by the end of this annual report you will come to know us as your friends and neighbors who are here to help. I welcome you to read about everything we have done for Van Buren County and hope you enjoy it as much as we enjoyed providing these services.

Sincerely,

*Kimberly Sinclair*



# OUR STAFF

**Kimberly Sinclair**  
Administrator

**Emily Hickmott**  
Deputy Administrator

**Jacob Diljak**  
Outreach Coordinator

**Kalli Marshall**  
Recycling and Materials  
Management Coordinator

**Lia Will**  
Administrative Associate

**Erin Fuller**  
Water Quality Project Manager

**Colleen Forestieri**  
Senior Conservation Specialist

**Kyle Mead**  
Senior MAEAP Specialist

**Lucas Hartman**  
Conservation Technician

**Carlie Southland**  
Conservation Associate

**Gabriel Francisco**  
Conservation Technician

**Alex Florian**  
CISMA Coordinator

**Abigale Bristol**  
Strike Team Coordinator

**Justin Palthe**  
Strike Team Crew Lead

**Lance McCarty**  
Strike Team Crew Member

**Hannah Hudson**  
Conservation Associate



*Left-to-right, third row back:* Erin Fuller, Justin Palthe, Kyle Mead, Carlie Southland, Gabriel Francisco  
*Middle row:* Colleen Forestieri, Alex Florian, Lucas Hartman, Emily Hickmott  
*Front row:* Abigale Bristol, Kimberly Sinclair, Jacob Diljak, Kalli Marshall  
*Not pictured:* Hannah Hudson, Lance McCarty, and Lia Will

# OUR BOARD OF DIRECTORS

**Bill VanTassel**  
Chairperson

**Jan Petersen**  
Vice-Chairperson

**Carl Druskovich**  
Treasurer

**Paulette Rybarski**  
Secretary

**Ron Klein**  
Member

*Left-to-right, back row:*  
Ron Klein, Jan Petersen, Paulette Rybarski  
*Front row:* Carl Druskovich, Bill VanTassel



# ACCOMPLISHMENTS

## Resource Recovery & Recycling

- 11 collection event days
- 1,066 households serviced at our collection events
- 8 categories of services
- 8,775 passenger and semi tires recycled
- 69 tons of large equipment and tractor tires (five semi trailers full) recycled
- 27,034 pounds of paint recycled
- 17,957 pounds of household hazardous waste (chemicals + pesticides) recycled
- 6,800 pounds of confidential paper shredded and recycled
- 77,082 pounds of electronics (accepted at collections and year-round site) recycled
- 51,270 pounds of mixed paper recycled
- 31,060 pounds of cardboard recycled
- Approximately 100 agriculture pesticide containers recycled
- Foam (Styrofoam™/polystyrene) recycling added to Recycle Roundup collection events

## Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP)/Water Screening/Equipment Rentals

- Approximately 1,200 acres planted with conservation equipment
- 6 water screenings conducted
- 7 new MAEAP verifications
- 9 MAEAP reverifications
- 30 MAEAP verifications in-process

## SWxSW Corner CISMA (Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area)

- 291,144 people educated:
    - Passive outreach: 289,683
    - Active outreach: 1,461
  - 2,472 acres surveyed
  - 37 acres treated
  - Sites of invasive species management service:**
    - 280 road commission sites
    - 4 kudzu sites
    - 1 stiltgrass site
    - 12 fee-for-service sites
- Partnerships with Chikaming Open Lands, Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy, Michigan Nature Association, and The Nature Conservancy with treatment partially funded by a Great Lakes Restoration Initiative grant through the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. The CISMA is also funded in part by the Michigan Invasive Species Grant Program, the Van Buren County Road Commission, and VBCD matching funds.*

## Agriculture Conservation/Water Quality Projects

- 59 water samples collected
- \$135,870 spent to incentivize conservation improvements on farms
- 93 no-till/reduced till acres
- 535 tons of sediment runoff prevented due to conservation practices on farms
- 5,500 acres of cover crops planted via airplane
- 884 acres of cover crops planted via tractor

## Reforestation

- 11,500 tree & shrub seedlings sold or donated

## Operations

- 35,371 tax bill inserts mailed out
  - 12 billboards posted
  - Twice-monthly Conservation Corner articles published in up to 4 Van Buren newspapers
  - Mini Grant: Village of Decatur Transfer Station Improvements
  - Facebook reach: 85,611
  - Instagram reach: 464
  - Facebook posts: 317
  - Instagram posts: 275
  - LinkedIn posts: 17
  - YouTube videos: 11
- Educational Workshops:** Summer School at Wolf Lake Fish Hatchery, Hikes and Paddles with a Naturalist, Backyard Symposium, and support of partner events

## National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD)

### Technical and Financial Assistance Programs:

- EQIP = Environmental Quality Incentives Program**
- 9 contracts
  - \$302,880 allocated to program participants
  - 1,488 acres committed to program
  - \$203.55 spent per acre enrolled in EQIP
- CSP = Conservation Stewardship Program**
- 3 contracts
  - \$106,051 allocated to program participants
  - 340.9 acres committed to program
  - \$469.49 spent per acre enrolled in CSP



Butterfly on Common Milkweed, Almena Township

# HIGHLIGHTS IN 2022, WE...

- Completed our **ninth year** of macroinvertebrate stream monitoring
- Held **two** Farm Field Days
- Completed the **second year** of the invasive species Strike Team
- Completed the **second year** of our summer education program
- Had **record breaking** Recycling Program participation
- Increased cost-shared cover crops by **47%** from the previous year
- Hired new staff:
  - Kalli Marshall**, Recycling & Materials Management Coordinator
  - Carlie Southland**, Conservation Associate
  - Gabriel Francisco**, Conservation Technician
  - Justin Palthe and Lance McCarty**, Seasonal Staff Members

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# OUR PARTNERS

Conservation cannot be done without the hard work and dedication of a community.

**We are grateful to all of our partners for their conservation work.**

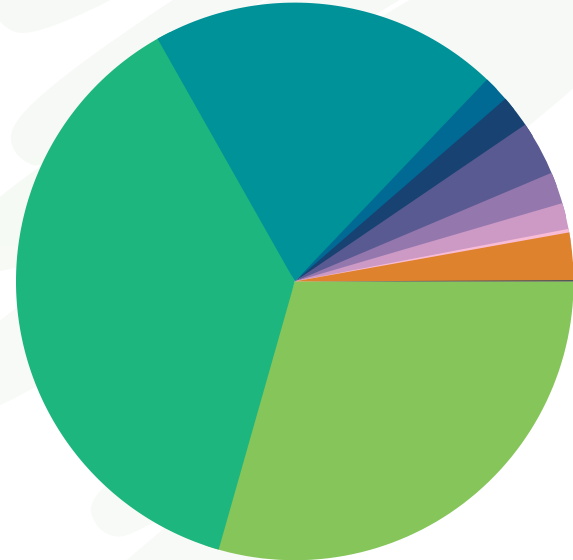


# CONSERVATION TAX DOLLARS AT WORK

**Fiscal Year Oct. 1, 2021 – Sept. 30, 2022 Revenues**

**Total: \$1,168,723.11**

*Based on unaudited figures.*



- Federal Grants 37.4%
- VBCD Operations Milage Funds 29.4%
- State Grants 20.3%
- Charges for Services 3.14%
- Other Revenues 2.75%
- Township/City/Village Recycling Contribution 1.86%
- Reforestation Tree Sales 1.84%
- Van Buren County Recycling Contribution 1.52%
- Rental Equipment 1.51%
- Interest 0.205%
- Local Grants 0.0642%

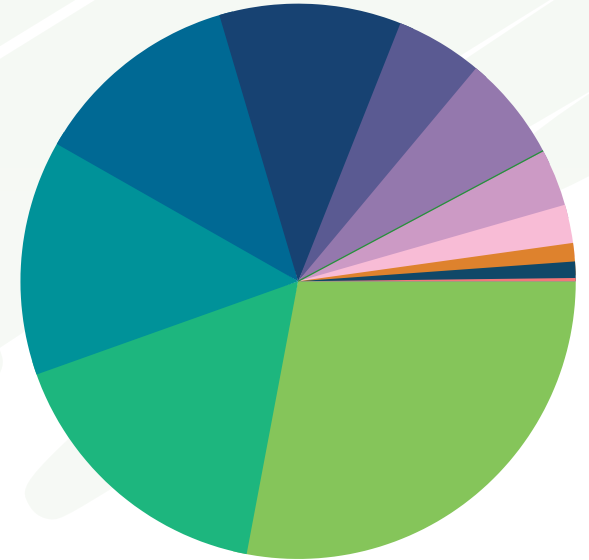
**For every \$1 of millage funding spent, the VBCD brings an additional \$3 into the County through conservation grant monies and other revenue streams.**

- VBCD Operations Millage Funds are collected from the 0.10 Van Buren Conservation District Operations millage that began January 2017

## Expenditures

**Total: \$1,232,029.88**

*Based on unaudited figures.*



- Operations 28.0%
- Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) 16.6%
- Resource Recovery 13.7%
- Pine-Mill-Mud Watershed Project 12.2%
- Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area (CISMA) 10.6%
- Michigan Agricultural Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP) 6.17%
- National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) 5.07%
- CISMA Strike Team 3.32%
- MI Natural Shoreline Partnership 2.24%
- Reforestation Tree Sales 1.07%
- Great Lakes Protection Fund (GLPF) 0.953%
- NRCS CT 0.120%
- Antimicrobial Resistance Project (AMRP) 0.0697%

**This year's income shortfall was a result of adding staff needed to meet service demand and adding start up costs for the CISMA Strike Team.**

- GLRI, AMRP, NACD, NRCS CT, MAEAP, MI Natural Shoreline Partnership, GLPF, and Pine Mill Mud all work with agricultural conservation and water quality projects
- CISMA refers to the Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area
- Operations includes organizational overhead and funding for grant match monies that are leveraged to bring dollars and services into Van Buren County



Strike Team Coordinator Abigale Bristol with white cedar seedlings (April 2022)

# FORESTS

Outreach Coordinator Jacob Diljak with elderberry seedlings (April 2022)



## Tree Sale

Our annual Tree Seedling Sale supports our goal to reforest Van Buren County with native trees and shrubs while raising funds to support conservation programs and education. We proudly sold and donated 11,500 native tree and shrub seedlings to nearly 200 customers in April 2022.

## Butterfield Drain Prescribed Burn

Conservation Technician Lucas Hartman began planning last year for a prescribed burn at Butterfield Drain. Butterfield Drain is a Van Buren Conservation District-owned property with 240 acres of woods, grassland, and wetland with a US Fish and Wildlife conservation easement. In order to remove invasive species, maintain the health of the grasslands, and restore the native landscape, District staff, the SWxSW Corner CISMA, and volunteers conducted a prescribed burn on 40 acres of the property.



Volunteer Andrew Michelak managing fire lines with a fire flapper (April 2022)

Volunteer Kami Williams with the fire line moving across the field (April 2022)



Volunteer Andrew Michelak and Conservation Technician Lucas Hartman examining the aftermath of the fire (April 2022)



“Low and slow,” said Burn Boss Steve Bare regarding the burning flames. Set with a drip torch, lines of fire moved slowly across the landscape burning native and unwanted plants alike. “Native plants have evolved to withstand, and even thrive, with frequent wildfires,” said Lucas Hartman. “Non-native, troublesome plants usually cannot tolerate fire so prescribed burns mimic nature.” Briars and brambles, which choke out native grasses and plants, went up in flames along with invasive species like autumn olive and reed canary grass. Left in its wake were ash and flame-kissed shrubs. The SWxSW Corner

CISMA Strike Team followed up the prescribed burn to cut stumps of lingering autumn olive and multiflora rose.

Plans for future prescribed burns on the remaining 200 acres of Butterfield Drain are in the works. Conservation practices like

prescribed burns and habitat management are a specialty of Conservation Technician Lucas Hartman. Hartman also provides technical assistance for management plans and cost-share applications to the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

### Haydon Woods

Haydon Woods is another Conservation District-owned property with forests and vernal ponds. Haydon Woods has its own forestry management plan based on federal forestry management plans and standards. District staff created and maintain the forestry management plan. Vernal ponds have distinct wildlife and flora that are not found anywhere else and are home to many rare species, making Haydon Woods’ vernal ponds so important. To protect these species and their habitat we protect this area, conduct management plans, and survey habitat quality.



### Kal-Haven Trail Clean Up

The first community clean up event since the beginning of the pandemic, the Kal-Haven Clean Up brought together District staff, Friends of the Kal-Haven Trail, and volunteers. Trash and debris were collected along two miles of the beautiful, forested Kal-Haven State Trail starting at the South Haven trailhead. We look forward to future community clean ups. Funding was provided by Keep Michigan Beautiful, Inc. who promote, educate and recognize beautification and restoration projects throughout Michigan.

Deputy Administrator Emily Hickmott and volunteer Carol Harris collecting trash during the Kal-Haven Trail Clean Up event (September 2022)



Senior MAEAP Specialist Kyle Mead making fire lines with a drip torch (April 2022)



Blueberry Field, Antwerp Township

# FARMS: SOIL & WATER

Senior Conservation Specialist Colleen Forestieri with multi-species cover crop (September 2022)



Senior MAEAP Specialist Kyle Mead discussing MAEAP during the Fall Field Day event (September 2022)



## Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP)

The Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP) offers free, confidential, and non-regulatory farm assessments that assist farmers in complying with state and federal laws and Michigan Right to Farm Guidelines.

MAEAP evaluates four system areas: farmstead, cropping, livestock, and forest/wetland/habitat. Once evaluated, the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (MDARD) can give a MAEAP verification in recognition from the State. This verification indicates that all practices, procedures, and operations done on the farm are environmentally sound according to Michigan's Generally Accepted Agricultural and Management Practices (GAAMPS). MAEAP verifications come with preferred consideration for technical assistance and cost-share, regulatory protections, recognition as a top steward in the community, and an enduring sense of pride and accomplishment.

Senior MAEAP Specialist Kyle Mead received the 2022 Fruit/Vegetable Grower News 40 Under 40 award for outstanding involvement, innovation, and leadership in the agricultural industry. Kyle brings his 19 years of experience working in MAEAP and has specialties in irrigation and small fruit.

32 total assessments completed

- 12 farm assessments
- 5 crop assessments
- 6 orchard assessments
- 6 livestock assessments
- 3 forest/wetland/habitat assessments

175 Risk Reductions completed

17 total MAEAP Verifications completed

- 8 farmstead system verifications
- 8 cropping system verifications
- 1 forest wildlife and habitat verifications





Senior Conservation Specialist Colleen Forestieri talking to attendees during the Farming for the Future conference (March 2022)

## Farming for the Future

After a two year absence because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Conservation District brought back our annual Farming for the Future conference in 2022. Over 100 farmers and agricultural consultants attended. They spent the day learning about profitable, environmentally-conscious, and climate smart farming practices and soil health. The event began with a panel of three local Southwest Michigan farmers who discussed overcoming barriers to soil health practices on the farm. Speaker RJ Rant discussed ecosystem management strategies for improving soil health and provided a corn tar spot update. Lance Gunderson, owner of Regen Ag Lab, discussed what goes into soil tests, secrets of the soil testing trade, and what farmers need to be aware of when testing their soil and analyzing their results. Russell Hedrick, a North Carolina farmer and co-owner of Soil Regen, discussed his journey with cover crops and building soil health. Providing these education and cost-share opportunities to local farmers supports our agricultural economy and brings conservation practices into reality.

Watch our Farming for the Future event on our YouTube channel @VanBurenCD!



## Farm Field Days

### Fall Field Day

Held in Lawrence at Kolberg Farms, our Fall Field Day showcased cover crops for annual crops and discussed District agricultural programs and services to more than 60 farmers. Attendees got a firsthand account as the Kolbergs discussed the changes they have made to their farm to incorporate no-till and cover crops practices. RJ Rant discussed soil health products that are being advertised to farmers, so they can be better informed when incorporating those products into their operation. Attendees witnessed a demonstration of cover crop

seeding via airplane. Senior Conservation Specialist Colleen Forestieri then led a tour through an established diverse cover crop planting to examine different species and discuss their benefits.

### MAEAP Fruit Field Day

Held in Lawton at Oxley Farms, our MAEAP Fruit Field Day brought together District staff and Southwest Michigan grape farmers to discuss cover crops in vineyard row middles and District programs and services. Farmers enjoyed locally-grown and produced wine while learning about cover crops, recycling, cost-share opportunities, MAEAP, and invasive pests. We are committed to providing the information and tools needed for our farmers to be more economically and environmentally sustainable.



Conservation Technician Lucas Hartman, Senior Conservation Specialist Colleen Forestieri, the Kolberg Family, Senior MAEAP Specialist Kyle Mead, Conservation Associate Carlie Southland, and Water Quality Project Manager Erin Fuller at the Fall Field Day (September 2022)



Senior Conservation Specialist Colleen Forestieri, with Conservation Technician Lucas Hartman, demonstrating buckwheat as a cover crop during the MAEAP Fruit Field Day (August 2022)



Vineyard, Oxley Farms, Antwerp Township

### Mitigating Agricultural Runoff in the Paw Paw River Watershed

This project aims to reduce bacteria, pathogens, and sediment and fertilizer runoff in the Mud Lake Drain, Pine Creek, and Mill Creek in the Hartford and Watervliet areas. These creeks, listed by the State of Michigan as impaired by bacteria and pathogens like E. coli, have benefited from cost-share and technical assistance for agricultural Best Management Practices (BMPs) and educational campaigns for farmers and residents. Practices like no-till, cover crops and filter strips are cost-shared to help keep nutrients on the farm and out of the water. The University of Notre Dame is partnering to perform water quality research to help assess the effectiveness of conservation practices in real-life settings. This project is funded by the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy.

### Drainage Water Management/Nutrient Reduction through Real-Time Optimization and Control

Beginning in 2020, the Van Buren Conservation District partnered with Xylem, Inc. and the University of Notre Dame to explore innovative approaches to managing farm runoff from tile lines. The team installed sensors in water control structures at the edge of a farm field to track nutrient loss and moisture levels. These sensors will allow for the development of a real-time control system that will enable farmers to monitor and control their tile runoff which would ultimately reduce nutrient loss and optimize soil moisture levels. This project is funded by the Great Lakes Protection Fund.

### Mitigating Agricultural Runoff in the Pine & Mill Creek Watersheds

Repeated manure inputs to farm fields can result in too many nutrients causing runoff that carries pathogens and fertilizer into lakes and rivers. Since 2020, this project has helped farmers implement a comprehensive system of practices to reduce fertilizer and pathogen runoff to highly agricultural watersheds. The system includes cover crops, filter strips, reduced tillage, drainage water management, and a phosphorus-removal plan using soil amendments and compaction reduction tools to increase crop yield. This project is funded by the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative.

### Antimicrobial Resistance in Flowing Waters

Beginning in 2021, the Van Buren Conservation District and the University of Notre Dame have worked together to research antimicrobial resistance in creeks and rivers. As the project continues, Conservation District staff will develop outreach materials from the research results and share information at annual farm conferences, on-farm field days, small grower meetings, an annual conservation agriculture newsletter, and presentations to agricultural classes. This project will help detect and quantify antimicrobial resistance so we can better understand how to control it in agricultural systems. This project is funded by the United States Department of Agriculture's Agriculture and Food Research Initiative.

### Natural Resources Conservation Service Technical Assistance

From soil erosion to complex livestock grazing operations, the Van Buren Conservation District can help find solutions for landowners dealing with natural resource concerns. With funding from the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Conservation Technicians Lucas Hartman and Gabriel Francisco meet with landowners on the farm to identify conservation

concerns and opportunities, recommend solutions, and help facilitate participation in financial assistance programs offered under the US Farm Bill. Climate smart conservation practices in agriculture and forestry are quickly becoming a major focus for the federal government. Our technicians can help landowners identify these concerns and suggest alternatives that will help reduce the effects of climate change.

Senior Conservation Specialist Colleen Forestieri, Conservation Technician Lucas Hartman, and Senior MAEAP Specialist Kyle Mead planting a multi-species cover crop (July 2022)



## Produce Safety

The Produce Safety Program is a free, voluntary, non-regulatory, statewide program designed to help growers evaluate on-farm practices with their produce. The program includes produce safety risk assessments, on-farm readiness review, bookkeeping education, Food Safety Modernization Act Produce Safety Rule education and technical assistance, and new Food and Drug Administration Food Safety Modernization Act compliance assistance. Our local Produce Safety Technician Patrick Gordon services Allegan, Berrien, Kalamazoo, and Van Buren Counties.

## Equipment Rental

For either a reduced-cost or free, the District provides equipment for no-till crop planting, invasive species management, soil testing, irrigation testing, and manure application testing.

- John Deere No-Till Drill: used for small grain, soybeans, and cover crops
- Truax Utility No-Till Drill: used for cool season grain and wildflower seed
- Brillion Seeder: used to plant continuous cover, hay, and pasture
- Japanese Knotweed Injector: herbicide injector used to treat Japanese knotweed
- Soil Test Probe: used to easily gather soil plugs for soil testing
- Wheel Scales: used to determine accurate manure application rates
- Irrigation Uniformity Catch Cups: used to determine irrigation output on the soil and how uniform applications are across the field

Multi-species cover crop, Paw Paw Township



# WATER



Paddle with a Naturalist on VanAuken Lake (August 2022)



Recycling and Materials Management Coordinator Kalli Marshall during Healthy Water Week (August 2022)



CISMA Coordinator Alex Florian and Conservation Associate Hannah Hudson at a Landing Blitz on the Black River in South Haven (July 2022)

Paw Paw Middle School student holding a Chinook salmon to be released in the Paw Paw River (May 2022)



## Macroinvertebrate Stream Monitoring

For the ninth consecutive year, the District, volunteers, and Two River Coalition members collected data on the species of macroinvertebrates (e.g. insects, crayfish, and snails) in the Paw Paw and Black Rivers. By collecting macroinvertebrates, we can measure the health of rivers since different species have differing tolerance levels to pollutants.

*The data collected can be found at: [micorps.net/about-data-exchange](https://micorps.net/about-data-exchange).*

## Salmon Release

District and SWxSW Corner CISMA staff joined the Two Rivers Coalition, Kalamazoo Audubon Society, and the Village of Paw Paw Department of Public Works in Paw Paw Middle School 6th graders' education on water ecosystems in their Salmon Release event. Students released Chinook salmon in the Paw Paw River; learned about watersheds, birds, and invasive species; and toured the Maple Lake dam.

## Healthy Water Week

Previously known as Water Screening Week, the Van Buren Conservation District reimagined the opportunity to include even more ways to keep our water healthy. District staff held a week-long open house at which residents and landowners were encouraged to visit and learn more about how they contribute to water health. Giveaways included tote bags, reusable straws, jar openers made from recycled tires, snacks, and more. Staff also performed free well water screening for nitrates and nitrites, which are chemicals that can cause serious health effects.

Water Quality Project Manager Erin Fuller at the Gravel Lake Association Annual Meeting (June 2022)



## Landing Blitzes

One of the main ways invasive species spread between lakes is by hitchhiking on boats and other recreational equipment. To encourage boaters to clean, drain, and dry their boats, the SWxSW Corner CISMA held nine Landing Blitz events at boat washes in Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren Counties.

## Connecting with Lake Residents

We partner with the Michigan Natural Shoreline Partnership to develop and share educational materials with those who live on and enjoy inland lakes. Resources such as brochures, Shoreline Living magazine, and leaflets teach the importance of natural lakeshores, native plants, and smart lawn maintenance, and give residents tools they need to help keep our inland lakes healthy and clean. These resources can be accessed by contacting the Van Buren Conservation District.



Native bees on wild bergamot, Alma Township

1st photo: Strike Team Crew Member Lance McCarty applying herbicide to honeysuckle (June 2022)

2nd photo: Strike Team Crew Lead Justin Palthe and Strike Team Crew Member Lance McCarty discussing plan of action to treat Japanese stiltgrass (July 2022)

CISMA Coordinator Alex Florian surveying for invasive species with a resident (September 2022)

# WILDLIFE

## SWxSW Corner CISMA

### What is a CISMA?

The SWxSW Corner CISMA is a Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area that works to help anyone in Berrien, Cass, or Van Buren Counties to understand, prevent, and manage invasive species. Invasive species pose a great risk to our natural resources,



environment, health, and economy. Our local CISMA oversees the identification, education, and treatment of invasive species in its service area. This was the second year of the CISMA's Strike Team, which was led by Strike Team



Coordinator Abigale Bristol. The Strike Team focuses on the surveying and management of invasive species. The team joins Invasive Species Coordinator Alex Florian who works in programs, education, and outreach.

### Outreach and Education

Our community is our greatest tool when addressing invasive species. It is through outreach and education that the CISMA is able to reach more people to identify, prevent, and manage invasive species. Together in this work, we reduce invasive species' impacts on our environment, public health, and economy. The more people that know about invasive species, the more eyes there are on the ground to identify them. More than 291,000

people were educated about invasive species in the tri-county area in 2022.

Surveys for spotted lanternfly (SLF) were conducted over the course of the summer by our CISMA. This leafhopper insect has wreaked havoc across Eastern Pennsylvania and the surrounding states. SLF has been shown to damage grape crops, making it a special concern for Southwest Michigan. In August

of 2022, SLF was discovered in Oakland County, Michigan. Surveys and insecticide treatments around that infestation are ongoing. SLF has not been found in our three county area. With installed traps and public outreach efforts, we remain focused on protecting our economy, ecosystems, and environment from this invasive species.





Strike Team Coordinator Abigale Bristol surveying for the invasive Japanese knotweed (September 2022)



Strike Team Crew Lead Justin Palthe spraying Phragmites near the Paw Paw River (September 2022)



Paddle with a Naturalist on VanAuken Lake (August 19 2022)

### Strike Team

The SWxSW Corner Cisma Strike Team completed its second year of invasive species survey and management. In the tri-county area, the team surveyed for spotted lanternfly. The team was contracted by the Van Buren County Road Commission to survey and treat the invasive plants, Phragmites and Japanese knotweed, along county road rights-of-way. Five known patches of priority invasive plants, Japanese stiltgrass and kudzu, were treated at no cost to landowners. The team was also contracted by land conservancies and private landowners to conduct treatment in high-quality habitats throughout the service area.

### Hike/Paddle with a Naturalist

The District partnered with Van Buren District Library Bloomingdale Branch and Gobles Branch to host two Hike with a Naturalist events on the Kal-Haven State Trail. Attendees learned about plants, insects, and ecosystems along the trail. In partnership with Two Rivers Coalition and Van Buren District Library Lawrence Branch and Bangor Branch, two Paddle with a Naturalist events were held on VanAuken and Reynolds Lakes. Paddlers learned about water quality, aquatic and shoreline habitats, and flora and fauna. These events connect people with the ecosystem around them, expanding their knowledge and understanding of their importance.

### Summer Education

After last year's successful summer education pilot program, the District continued to teach children about natural resources in the summer months. This year, we partnered with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources at Wolf Lake Fish Hatchery to provide children with education on wildlife. School-aged children learned about the fish hatchery, aquatic animals, ecosystems, and insects with hands-on experience.



### Invasive Species Watch List

These are some of the highlighted invasive species to be on the lookout for in Van Buren County.

- Asian long-horned beetle
- Black and pale swallow wort
- Chinese yam
- European frogbit
- Flowering rush
- Hemlock wooly adelgid
- Japanese knotweed
- Japanese stiltgrass
- Kudzu
- Phragmites
- Spotted lanternfly
- Oak wilt

For photos, descriptions, and treatment methods visit [msin.msu.edu](http://msin.msu.edu) or contact the SWxSW Corner Cisma Coordinator at 269-633-9044 or email [invasivesed@vanburencd.org](mailto:invasivesed@vanburencd.org)

1st photo: Conservation Associate Carlie Southland teaching Lawton Elementary students about aquatic insects (July 2022) 2nd photo: Administrative Associate Lia Will assisting students with insect identification (July 2022)



Group photo from Lawrence Recycle Roundup  
(October 2022)



**Mixed Paper & Cardboard:**  
51,270 pounds of mixed paper  
31,060 pound of cardboard at  
Gobles Village Market

# RESOURCE RECOVERY & RECYCLING

Resource Recovery had an impactful year. It has been a successful collection season with record breaking numbers of materials collected for nearly every category of service, which can be seen on the following sections. A record 1,066 residents participated over the course of our eleven collection event days, representing at least as many households! We offered opportunities for recycling and responsible disposal for: passenger and semi tires, large tires, shredded paper, household hazardous waste including paint, mixed paper, cardboard, pesticide containers, and electronics. We are excited to share that our collections in 2023 will now offer foam (Styrofoam™/polystyrene) recycling in addition to the other services.

**Household Hazardous Waste (HHW),  
Paint, and Other Chemicals:**  
17,957 pounds of HHW and  
27,034 pounds of paint  
*that's about the weight of 2 elephants*



**Large Tires:**  
69 tons of large equipment  
and tractor tires  
5 semi trailers in total



**Passenger & Semi Tires:**  
8,775  
12 full semi trailers in total



**Confidential Paper Shredding:**  
6,800 pounds of paper shredded



**Pesticide Containers:**  
Approximately 100 agricultural  
pesticide containers

**Electronics:**  
77,082 pounds of electronics  
*Between one day  
collection events and our  
year-round collection site  
at Lakeview Community  
Thrift Shop, including 611 TVs!*



**Foam (Styrofoam™/polystyrene):**  
New service coming in fiscal  
year 23! Save your clean and  
dry foam to recycle at our  
Recycle Roundup Collections







Outreach Coordinator Jacob Diljak at the South Haven Farmers Market (June 2022)

# OUTREACH & EDUCATION

## VBCD Library

We maintain a community library on a host of natural resources topics available for residents and landowners to borrow. Topics range from plant identification and gardening to water quality, cover crops, and more!

## Backyard Symposium

The second year of our Backyard Symposium webinar series provided viewers with additional ways to connect with the environment around them. Topics were native plants versus natives, beekeeping, garden pests, Michigan mushrooms, and permaculture. The whole series was recorded and can be found on our YouTube channel at [www.youtube.com/c/VanBurenCD](http://www.youtube.com/c/VanBurenCD).

## Youth Outreach & Education






To empower the next generation of stewards and conservationists, the District engages with youth to build an understanding of what natural resource conservation is and why it is important. This year, the District partnered with a number of organizations to foster youth education. During Kids' Day at the Van Buren County Youth Fair, District staff assisted our Van Buren County Farm Bureau partners in learning about water quality and agriculture. Children were farmers for a day by harvesting crops and selling them at market before learning about aquatic insects and their relationship to water quality. The District donated water bottles and other school supplies to Van Buren County students at the Back to School Bonanza at Lawrence ISD Conference Center. In partnership with Van Buren County District Library, the District assisted in learning activities for their Pop Up Lit Lab program. All these activities and more promoted understanding of such natural resource conservation topics such as water quality, agriculture, recycling, and more.

## Food, Farm & Fun Guide

The much-anticipated Van Buren County Food, Farm & Fun Guide (the Guide) was brought back in 2022 after a break during the pandemic. The Guide features Van Buren County and surrounding area farms, farm stands and markets, food and drink vendors (that use local ingredients), florists, nurseries, and organizations working in natural resources. This year, we added outdoor recreation information as well as local festivals. The Guide is part of our local food promotion program and, along with festivals and outdoor recreation, further promotes our county's agricultural and tourism industries. District staff attended five farmers markets in 2022 to promote the Guide and District programs and services. View the 2022 Van Buren County Food, Farm & Fun Guide online: [vanburencd.org/food-farm-fun/](http://vanburencd.org/food-farm-fun/)

## Media

Conservation is a community effort, which is why we make an effort to reach as many people as we can. Whether folks are a farmer, citizen scientist, or just trying to make a difference, we use traditional and digital media to share conservation topics and District programs, services, and events. We can be found in local newspapers (our Conservation Corner is featured in four newspapers), billboards, advertisements, and winter tax bill inserts. Digitally, the District is active across Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and YouTube. Our monthly e-newsletters (available for subscription at the bottom of our website) provide subscribers with information directly sent to their email inbox. Be sure to subscribe or give us a follow to stay up-to-date with District programs, services, and conservation education!

-  [VanBurenCD.org](http://VanBurenCD.org)
-  [VanBurenCD](https://www.facebook.com/VanBurenCD)
-  [vbcdmi](https://www.instagram.com/vbcdmi)
-  [Van Buren Conservation District](https://www.linkedin.com/company/Van-Buren-Conservation-District)
-  [VanBurenCD](https://www.youtube.com/VanBurenCD)



Senior Conservation Specialist Colleen Forestieri and Deputy Administrator Emily Hickmott, joined with State Representative Eric Nesbitt, awarding Kolberg Family Farm with the Farmer of the Year Award at the VBCD Annual Meeting (July 2022)

## Annual Meeting

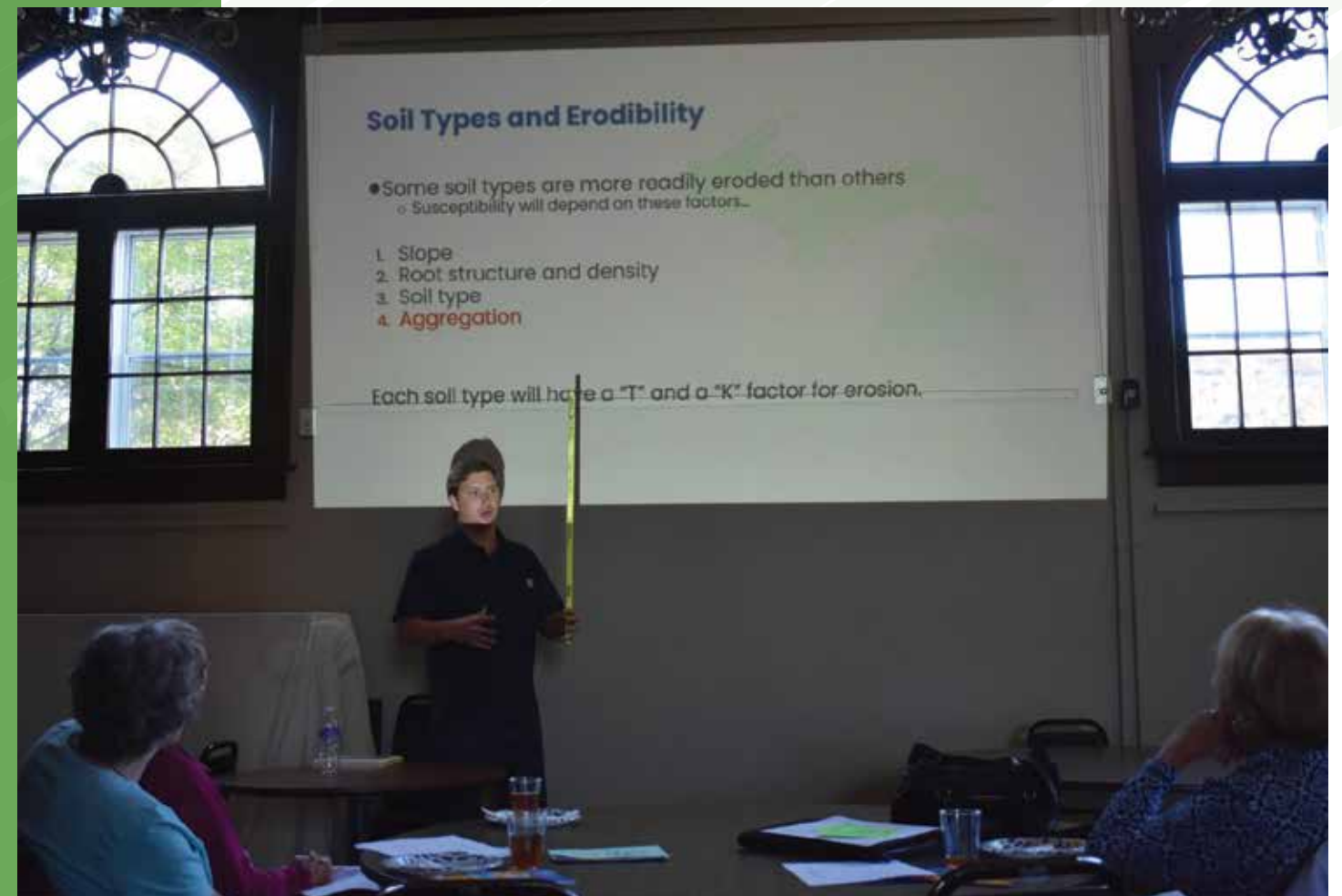
This year we held our Annual Meeting, Director Election, and Picnic at Wolf Lake State Fish Hatchery. Attendees included state congresspeople, county and municipal leaders, partners, volunteers, and members of the general public. District staff and board members introduced themselves before discussing their respective programs and highlights from the year. Conservationists of the Year were awarded from previous and current years: Phil Hover (2019), Susan Mathews (2020), and Two Rivers Coalition (2021). Kolberg Family Farm was awarded Farmer of the Year for their on-the-farm conservation practices. Afterwards attendees enjoyed drinks from Snake Oil Roasters, corn from Druskovich Farms, food from Walt & Marie's Country Market, Brookside Farms blueberries with ice cream, and a hog roast from Van Buren Youth Fair's dual awardee grand champion and supreme swine.

Join us for our 2023 Annual Meeting, Director Election, and Picnic July 26, 2023!

## Presentations

When schools, clubs, and other organizations reach out for educational presentations the District is happy to answer whenever possible. This year we gave presentations on a variety of natural resource topics for a number of organizations. Conservation Technician Lucas Hartman gave an erosion presentation to the Carnegie Garden Club. District staff gave Earth Day presentations to four organizations: Paw Paw District Library, Van Buren District Library Lawrence, Hope College, and St. Mary's Preschool. Senior Conservation Specialist Colleen Forestieri gave a cover crop presentation at the 2021 Great Lakes Expo and, with CISMA Coordinator Alex Florian, presented to Intermediate School District's natural resource class on forest ecology and conservation in agriculture. Water Quality Project Manager Erin Fuller presented at the Michigan Inland Lake Convention. Deputy Administrator Emily Hickmott presented at the Webster Memorial Library on recycling. Presentations like these enable us to connect with our communities and educate residents on natural resource concerns that affect them.

Conservation Technician Lucas Hartman giving a presentation on erosion to the Carnegie Garden Club (June 2022)





Red-winged blackbird, Wolf Lake State Fish Hatchery

