



Van Buren Conservation District

November 2023 Ag Conservation/Water Quality Projects Board Report

Prepared 12/5/23

Staff: Colleen Forestieri Erin Fuller Carlie Southland

Highlight

In November, the Ag and Water Quality Team completed a grant application that, if funded, will provide cost share for agricultural conservation practices, provide technical assistance, and fund research that supports the effectiveness of conservation practices on farm fields. Funding would support local farmers by helping them adopt practices new to their farms, like cover crops, no-till, filter strips and nutrient management. These practices can benefit the farm by improving soil health, improving yields, and reducing erosion. The practices also help improve water quality in our local lakes and streams by reducing polluted runoff.

Pine/Mill/Mud 319 Project (EGLE 319 Grant)

Activities & Accomplishments

1. Water sampling from tile drains and streams 11/9/23, 11/20/23
2. Farmer meetings
3. Prep for post-harvest cover crop applications
4. Fix leaking water control structures
5. Farming for the Future speaker meetings 11/21/23, 11/28/23
6. Farming for the Future conference prep meeting 11/29/23

Upcoming Activities

1. Water sampling from tile drains and streams
2. Farmer interviews
3. Outreach planning
4. Farmer roundtable 12/20/23
5. Farming for the Future planning

USDA - Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) Project (Notre Dame)

Activities & Accomplishments

1. Continue outreach activities
2. Quarterly reporting submitted 10/10/23



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3. Farming for the Future conference prep meeting 10/24/23

Upcoming Activities

1. Continue outreach activities

Other

Activities & Accomplishments

1. Weekly staff meetings
2. Social media tasks
3. EGLE 319 grant writing (due 11/15/23)
4. Work Agreement meeting 11/1/23
5. Meeting w/ UND re: grant proposal 11/1/23
6. Backyard Symposium planning
7. Water Quality Team mtg 11/7/23
8. Staff retreat 11/16/23

Upcoming Activities

1. MiCorp grant reporting
2. Water Quality Team mtg 12/7/23
3. VBCD board meeting 12/13/23
4. Forestieri Mid-year Review Check-in 12/13/23
5. MI Natural Shoreline Partnership Outreach subcommittee 12/14/23
6. Fuller Mid-year Review Check-in 12/19/23

New Grant Proposals Submitted

1. Submitted EGLE 319 grant ("Stacking BMPs to Mitigate Agricultural Runoff in the Paw Paw River") on 11/15/23



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Photos

Senior Conservation Specialist Colleen Forestieri discusses clever crops with a local farmer.





SW x SW Corner Cisma

November 2023 Board Report

Prepared 12/01/2023

Staff: Alex Florian Abigale Bristol Jena Johnson

Highlights

In November, the Cisma presented on Knotweed to the Berrien County Road department, Parks department, and buildings and ground departments. The season has officially ended and time was spent organizing and reviewing data and systems. Winter work was organized and scheduled for Dr. T.K. Lawless Park (Great Lakes Restoration Initiative – GLRI) and Nokmes Preserve (Chikaming Open Lands).

Activities & Accomplishments

1. Knotweed presentation Berrien County
2. Completed Michigan Invasive Species Grant Program (MISGP) grant reporting
3. Began reviewing data from the field season
4. Readdressed the Cisma Species Prioritization Tool
5. Coordinated treatment with Chikaming Open Lands
6. Submitted required documents for aquatic permits, NPDES and ANC
7. Began writing grant for Bipartisan Infrastructure Law

Meetings/Trainings Attended

1. Michigan Paddle Stewards Fall meeting
2. Regional Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) Coordination through GLRI
3. Michigan Invasive Species Conference (MISC) annual meeting planning committee
4. Two Rivers Coalition (TRC) annual meeting
5. Cass Conservation District annual meeting
6. European frogbit collaborative meeting

Upcoming Activities

1. MiCorps grant reporting
2. Cisma annual meeting planning

New Grant Proposals Submitted

1. None

Species of the Month: Balsam Woolly Adelgid | BWA | *Adelges piceae*

Overview:

1. Often found on the bark of balsam and Fraser firs (common Christmas tree species)
2. Causes tree twigs to swell and become distorted, impacting the health and quality of the tree
3. In the winter they lose their legs and grow a white, waxy substance that looks like wool
4. Confirmed locations in Michigan: Kent, Missaukee, and Oceana Counties.
5. Native to central Europe

Identification:

1. Observing symptoms in firs is the best way to identify the presence of BWA. Look for:
 - a. Flattened or stunted tree top
 - b. Swollen at the points where the leaves meet the twig
 - c. Wilted new shoots
 - d. Dead shoots or branches
 - e. Branches turning brick-red

Balsam Woolly Adelgid



Check your Christmas trees for galls





Van Buren Conservation District

November 2023 MAEAP Board Report

Prepared December 2023

Staff: Kyle Mead



Highlights:

FY24 has MAEAP challenging the techs to get all lapsed farmers contacted for re-verification, to re-verify as many farms as we can to keep our retention percentage up, as well as for every tech to get 12 new verifications. With 12 new and 59 reverifications from 5 years ago, Van Buren's verification goal is 71. With the help of Gabe and Lucas, the new verification goal should go smoothly. To hit the ground running, the specialist completed 8 Verifications (5 new and 3 Re) at the start of November.

Percentage Completed: 17.0% of required assessments completed

0% of verifications

Activities, Accomplishments, & Challenges

1. 11/1 – Forestry, Wetlands, & Habitat (FWH) Verification – Decatur
2. 11/1 – FWH Verification – Decatur (another)
3. 11/1 – Farmstead System (FAS), Cropping System (CAS) ,CAS RE-Verification – South Haven
4. 11/1 – FAS, CAS, Livestock System (LAS) Verification – Decatur
5. 11/3 – Soybean Yield Checks for MISoy competition – Schoolcraft
6. 11/9 – FAS, CAS, LAS RE-Assessment – Paw Paw
7. 11/15 – Water Samples taken for farm to prep for RE-Verification
8. 11/20 – Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS)/MAEAP Field Visit – Covert
9. 11/30 – FAS, CAS RE-Assessment – Lawton

Meetings/Trainings Attended

1. 11/2 – Van Buren MAEAP Goal Setting – Office
2. 11/6 – Produce Safety Tech Goal Setting – Zoom
3. 11/9 – MAEAP Tech Quarterly – Zoom
4. 11/14 – Envirothon Meeting – Zoom
5. 11/29 – Farming for the Future Meeting – Office



Van Buren Conservation District

November 2023 MAEAP Board Report

Prepared December 2023

Staff: Kyle Mead



A*Syst Type	Monthly A*Systs	Fiscal Year to Date A*Systs
Farm*A*Systs:	4	7
Orchard*A*Systs:	11	22
Greenhouse*A*Systs:		
Nursery*A*Systs:		
Crop*A*Systs:	1	1
Livestock*A*Systs:	1	1
FWHP*A*Systs:		2
Total Assessments Completed (always year to date):	17	33/ 88 Goal
On Farm Risk Reductions (always year to date):		0 / 150 Goal
MAEAP Verifications (always year to date):	8	8 completed YTD (2 FAS, 3 CAS, 1 LAS, 2 FWH) 71 Goal

Photos



Van Buren Conservation District:
November 2023 NACD Technical Assistance
Board Report
Prepared December 2023
Staff: Lucas Hartman



Highlights

Application deadline for the first round of funding in 2024 for EQIP has closed. More than 40 new applications were submitted by producers and landowners.

Activities & Accomplishments

1. Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)
 - a. Payments / Certification for conservation practices
 - i. Nutrient Management
 - ii. Cover Crops
 - iii. Pest Management Conservation Systems
 - iv. Forest Management Plans
 - b. New Applications
 - i. Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) and Conservation District staff care currently processing over 40 new applications for EQIP in 2024
2. Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)
 - a. Payments / certifications
 - i. Annual payments for maintenance of conservation activities present at time of contract signing
 - ii. Certification of new and enhanced conservations practices
 1. Enhanced nutrient management
 2. Multi species cover crops
 3. Enhanced Integrated Pest Management Techniques
 - b. New Applications: none
3. Conservation Operations Technical Assistance (CoTA)
 - a. 3 expiring contracts in 2024 have been renewed for an additional 5 years of enhanced conservation practices.



Van Buren Conservation District:
November 2023 NACD Technical Assistance
Board Report
Prepared December 2023
Staff: Lucas Hartman



Upcoming Events

1. New Farm Bill in 2024
 - a. New farm bill is expected to go into effect in December 2023.
 - b. The new bill will include additional and reorganized spending for conservation practices through the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)
2. New EQIP protocol for FY2024 – “ACT NOW”
 - a. ACT NOW will allow field office to expedite the funding process for those plans that include a limited number of conservation practices
 - i. **This protocol has been delayed. Paw Paw field office is awaiting details on program dates / deadlines.
 1. ex// Forest management plans, cover crop, field borders, nutrient management, etc.
 2. This will allow the Paw Paw field office to decrease wait times for customers interested in cost share for smaller projects.

New Grant Proposals Submitted

1. Proposal for NACD TA and Outreach 2023 grant submitted to MACD on July 27
 - a. Offering \$35,000 of matching funds for a total project budget of \$159,000 to support two conservation planning technicians to aid landowners in Farm Bill Programs.
 - b. Currently awaiting selections



Highlights

Activities & Accomplishments

1. With planning for the “Farming for the Future” conference well under way and our designated topic focuses being set, we are happy to let you know that we will be featuring a livestock/grazing tract once again which will highlight ongoing conservation methods and whole farm thinking approaches when it comes to livestock and soil health. This past month we were very fortunate to also secure our keynote speaker, and while I personally am not going to announce it yet, I will say that I am very excited that the VBCD’s “Farming for the Future” conference will host such an engaging speaker that I personally have heard present before at last years “Grassworks 2.0 conference”. While his name may not be the most well recognized, the work he has contributed to the scientific community in terms of soil science has definitely played an important role in helping us understand the impacts of soil nutrition.

I am happy to announce that one of our speakers for the Livestock/Grazing Tract will be Dr. Erin Burns from Michigan State University and she will be presenting her session on “Weed Control in Hayfields & Pastures – Helping Ecology Work for You”. I first met with Dr. Burns at the “Great Lakes Forage and Grazing Conference” in 2021 and am excited to have her present her topic again for the farmers in our area!

Meetings/Trainings Attended and Farm Visited

1. 11/1 – Farm Visit – Scots, MI
2. 11/2 – Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP) Goal Setting Meeting
3. 11/2 – Backyard Symposium Meeting
4. 11/6 – Farm Visit – Paw Paw, MI
5. 11/6 – Van Buren Youth Fair Board Meeting
6. 11/9 – Ag Team Meeting
7. 11/16 – Staff Team Building Day
8. 11/28 – Farming for the Future Meeting with Keynote Speaker
9. 11/29 – Farming for the Future Meeting
10. 11/30 – Farming for the Future Meeting with Dr. Erin Burns



Van Buren Conservation District
November 2023 NRCS CT Board Report
Prepared: December 2023
Staff: **Gabriel Francisco**



New Grant Proposals Submitted

N/A

Upcoming Activities

With the farm bill still not yet passed, the current EQIP cycle has been on a bit of a delay and current work is being largely focused on upcoming events and conferences. I will be presenting at this year's Backyard Symposium (February 2024, more details to come) on the topic of backyard poultry. Backyard poultry is a steadily growing agricultural hobby and interest that is not only being done in the more rural areas of our county, but in the more urban areas as well! During my presentation, I will focus on the laws and regulations around keeping poultry in not only Van Buren County but the State of Michigan as well, as well as any laws and regulations it takes to legally sell any animal products from them, including Meat, Eggs, Live Birds, Feathers, and Manure.

I have also been hard at work helping to prepare for this year's Farming for the Future Conference which will take place on March 13, 2024. I will be largely helping to facilitate the Livestock/Grazing tract again and am looking forward to engaging and informative speakers once again.

Photos



Kyle Mead considering the majesty of the oaks and beeches during staff team building day.



Van Buren Conservation District
November 2023 Outreach Board Report
Prepared 11/30/2023
Staff: **Jacob Diljak**

Highlights

November was a busy month working on calendars, the annual report, Tree Sale, and Backyard Symposium. Keep an eye out for these publications and webinar!

Activities & Accomplishments

1. Social media management: Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, TikTok, data tracking
2. Financials: invoice and receipt management
3. General VBCD photography: events, presentations, stock photography
4. Conservation Corner: review, editing
5. VBCD Newsletter: drafting, sending
6. 2024 Tree Sale: window decals, website updates, species information rework
7. 2023 Annual Report: draft work with designer, photos, and editing
8. 2024 VBCD Calendar: final draft, sent to printer
9. 2024 Backyard Symposium: speaker coordination and planning
10. 2024 Food, Farm, & Fun Guide: advertiser work, editing, rough draft work
11. 2024 Billboards: planning and coordination
12. Tax Bill Inserts: editing and proofreading
13. Branding: staff training on consistent branding

Meetings/Trainings Attended

1. Staff meetings (11/7, 11/14, 11/21, 11/28)
2. Admin team meeting (11/2)
3. Outreach Check-In (11/15)
4. Outreach One-on-One Check-in (11/9)
5. Backyard Symposium Google Meet Tests (11/2, 11/7)
6. Waverly Township Board Meeting (11/2)
7. VBCD Board Meeting (11/8)
8. Two Rivers Coalition Annual Meeting (11/8) **pictured**
9. Staff Team Building Day (11/16)
10. Thanksgiving Potluck (11/21)
11. Backyard Symposium Meeting (11/21)
12. Two Rivers Coalition Board Meeting (11/21)
13. Paw Paw Village Council Meeting (11/27)



Van Buren Conservation District
November 2023 Outreach Board Report
Prepared 11/30/2023
Staff: Jacob Diljak

New Grant Proposals Submitted

1. NA

Upcoming Activities

1. Village of Decatur Council Meeting (12/4)
2. Keeler Township Regular Board Meeting (12/5)
3. Two Rivers Coalition Board Meeting (12/19)

	Trends	Content	Audience
Facebook	3,076 People Reached	21 Posts	2,596 Page Followers (0 ↑)
Instagram	141 People Reached	19 Posts	244 Followers (1 ↑)
LinkedIn	18 Impressions	0 Posts	50 Followers (3 ↑)
YouTube	Total Views	-	1,070Subscribers (20 ↑)
TikTok	3 Likes	2 Posts	51 Followers (14 ↑)

Event Category	Number of Events	Impressions
Miscellaneous	3	88
VBCD Events	0	0
Farmers Markets	0	0



Van Buren Conservation District
November 2023 Outreach Board Report
Prepared 11/30/2023
Staff: Jacob Diljak



Outreach Coordinator Jacob Diljak holding a booth at the Two Rivers Coalition Annual Meeting in Lawrence (11/8).

Produce Safety Monthly Report

October 1, 2023 – October 31, 2023



Completed

- Macro invertebrate collection (10/1)
- NCR FSMA Fall Professional Development Training Jefferson City, MO (10/3-10/4)
 - Travel (10/1-10/5)
- Newsletter Planning Meeting (10/10)
- Farm Visit Battle Creek (10/12)
- PSA Grower Training Practice (10/18)
- OFRR Hartford/ Benton Harbor (10/20)
- Quarterly Tech Check (10/20)
- PSA Grower Training Update (10/24)
- PSA Grower Training Cancelled/ Grower Training Practice (10/26)
- PS Tech Chats (10/27)
- MIOFPS Monthly Huddle (10/27)
- Work on Newsletter Article for November MIOFPS Newsletter
- Work on and submit two farms for MIOFPS Certification
- Continue working and corresponding with ValleyHUB and working with their participating farms
- Continue working on additional partnerships to expand the reach of the Produce Safety Program in southwest Michigan

County	Berrien	Kent
Farm Visits	1	1

Produce Safety Monthly Report

November 1, 2023 – November 30, 2023



Completed

- Farm Visit Battle Creek (11/3)
- Produce Safety Goal Setting Meeting (11/6)
- Newsletter Planning Meeting (11/7)
- Planning Meeting ValleyHUB (11/8)
- Submit Late Season Wildlife Management newsletter article (11/11)
- Farm Visit Battle Calhoun County (11/14)
- MIOFPS Fall PD Meeting (11/21)
- Farm Visit Galesburg (11/28)
- Working on certification for three farms
- Work on Newsletter article for 11/11
- Begin working on newsletter article – safety risks for controlled environment agriculture.
- Work on MIFFS presentation material – Low budget ideas for wash – pack areas/ PSRA's
- Work on material for ValleyHUB Annual Meeting
- On going correspondence and outreach to service area growers.
-

County	Calhoun
Farm Visits	2



Van Buren Conservation District
November 2023 Resource Recovery Board Report
Prepared December 2023
Staff: Kalli Marshall



Highlights

November was fun and exciting for youth education. Kalli attended Bangor High School for a full day of presentations to all science classes (pictured below). Then, she ended the month with a visit to the Lawrence Elementary third grade classes for recycling education and a game.

Activities & Accomplishments

1. Responded to residents who had recycling questions with options for disposal/recycling
2. Submitted appropriate check requests for Gobles Village Market paper/cardboard recycling
3. Scheduled social media posts for November 2023
4. Read resource recovery updates from Michigan Recycling Coalition, The Recycling Partnership, and EGLE to keep informed of trends and changes
5. Tracked electronics collection for November 2023
6. Remained up to date with 2023 Scrap Tire Grant requests from partners and closed out grant
7. Resupplied Battery Recycling Stations
8. Processed Invoices from Scrap Tire Grant
9. Held discussions and planning for EGLE Infrastructure grant
10. Scheduled Presentations and developed lesson plans with schools for youth recycling education
11. Delivered Recycling Guides to municipal halls who needed more

Meetings/Trainings Attended

1. 11/2/2023 - Admin Team Meeting
2. 11/6/2023 - The Recycling Partnership Meeting
3. 11/6/2023 - City of South Haven Council Meeting
4. 11/7/2023, 11/14/2023, 11/21/2023, 11/28/2023 - Staff Meeting
5. 11/8/2023, 11/9/2023 - Tax Bill Insert Deliveries
6. 11/8/2023 - Resource Recovery Admin Meeting
7. 11/8/2023 - Adulting 101 Webinar MSUE
8. 11/9/2023 - Decatur Township Board Meeting
9. 11/14/2023 - Tools and Resources Materials Management Planning Webinar
10. 11/14/2023 - Annual Update Van Buren County Board of Commissioners
11. 11/15/2023 - Bloomingdale Township Board Meeting
12. 11/16/2023 - Staff Team Building
13. 11/17/2023 - Bangor High School Recycling Presentations
14. 11/20/2023 - Micorp Macroinvertebrate Grant Reporting
15. 11/27/2023 - Trees for Troops



Van Buren Conservation District

November 2023 Resource Recovery Board Report

Prepared December 2023

Staff: Kalli Marshall

16. 11/27/2023 - Lawrence Elementary Presentation Third Grade
17. 11/29/2023 - Michigan Materials Management Community Engagement Group Meeting
18. 11/29/2023 - Recycling Behavior Change Webinar

New Grant Proposals Submitted

1. NA

Upcoming Activities

1. Prepare compost video for Paw Paw Library
2. Prepare Resource Recovery Management Plan for Growers
3. Research/develop A*Syst Program booklets for restaurants, organizations, growers, schools, homes, municipalities
4. Hang Recycle, MI signs somewhere impactful
5. Hartford School Recycling Collaboration
6. School Education Planning

Photos

