



Highlight

In December, Van Buren Conservation District staff Erin Fuller, Colleen Forestieri, and Carlie Southland participated in a round table meeting with local Van Buren County farmers. This meeting was hosted by Michigan Agriculture Advancement. The purpose of this meeting was to get a producer perspective on conservation programs and practices and what new efforts might be needed, and to have conversations with farmers to brainstorm new ideas for better policies going forward.

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

Activities & Accomplishments

1. Water sampling from tile drains and streams 12/4/23, 12/7/23, and 12/19/23
2. Farmer interviews
3. Outreach planning
4. Farmer roundtable 12/20/23
5. Farming for the Future planning meetings 12/12/23, 12/19/23

Upcoming Activities

1. Water sampling 1/4/24, 1/17/24, 1/31/24

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

Activities & Accomplishments

1. Continue outreach activities
2. Farmer roundtable 12/20/23
3. Contributed edits to an informational video 12/20/23

Upcoming Activities

1. Continue reviewing educational Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) videos
2. Continue planning education events for 2024
3. Quarterly reporting



Van Buren Conservation District
December 2023 Ag Conservation/Water Quality Projects Board Report
Prepared 12/28/23

Staff: Colleen Forestieri Erin Fuller Carlie Southland

Other

Activities & Accomplishments

1. Weekly staff meetings
2. Great Lakes Expo 12/6/23
3. Water Quality Team mtg 12/7/23
4. VBCD board meeting 12/13/23
5. Forestieri Mid-year Review Check-in 12/13/23
6. Southland Mid-year Review Check-in 12/14/23
7. MI Natural Shoreline Partnership Outreach subcommittee 12/14/23
8. CDEM GIS training 12/14/23
9. Worked with MNSP on potential printing of Shoreline Living 2
10. Fuller Mid-year Review Check-in 12/19/23
11. Backyard Symposium planning

Upcoming Activities

1. MNSP Outreach subcommittee meeting - 1/12/24
2. Water Quality Team mtg 1/16/24
3. LTAR Winter Summit Stakeholder Committee (Participant) - 1/19/24
4. VBCD Board meeting - 1/24/24
5. VBCD Strategic Planning - 1/31/24
6. Introduction to Lakes class (Attendee)(Southland)
7. Focus Group about food grade grains (Participant) - 2/6/24
8. Underground Innovations Grower Meeting (Attendee) - 2/8/24
9. Michigan Corn Cover Crop Boot Camp (Speaking) - 2/9/24
10. Soil & Water Conservation Society Seminar (Speaking) - 3/8/24

New Grant Proposals Submitted

1. none



Van Buren Conservation District
December 2023 Ag Conservation/Water Quality Projects Board Report
Prepared 12/28/23

Staff: Colleen Forestieri Erin Fuller Carlie Southland

Photos



Senior Conservation Specialist Colleen Forestieri discusses conservation programs with local farmers.



SW x SW Corner Cisma

December 2023 Board Report

Prepared Jan 3, 2024

Staff: Alex Florian Abigale Bristol Jena Johnson

Highlights

This month primarily looked to the future. We spent much of our time planning annual meetings, writing grants, and updating our list of priority species. With greater organization and communication across the Cisma team as a whole, our grip on funding and grant goals has become more tangible and better understood. We are entering 2024 with a readiness and excitement like never before!

Activities & Accomplishments

1. Planned SWxSW Corner Cisma Annual Meeting
2. Alex helped to plan the MISC annual meeting
3. Alex worked on a grant to put boat wash signage at several launches
4. Worked with Species Prioritization Subcommittee to begin an updated Priority Species list
5. Submitted reporting for MiCorps mini grant
6. Sought out contractors to increase Cisma Strike Team capacity
7. Abbie submitted Aquatic Nuisance Control permits

Meetings/Trainings Attended

1. TSN Coordinator visioning session

Upcoming Activities

1. MISC annual meeting
2. Continue species prioritization
3. TSN Conference

New Grant Proposals Submitted

1. USFS Bipartisan Infrastructure Law | Invasive Plant Control Throughout the Jones Conservation Corridor | \$281,350 funding requested | Expected decision date: Spring 2024





SW x SW Corner Cisma

December 2023 Board Report

Prepared Jan 3, 2024

Staff: Alex Florian Abigale Bristol Jena Johnson

Event of the Month:

Join us for the SWxSW Corner Cisma 2024 Annual Meeting!

Date: Friday, February 16, 2024

Time: 1pm - 3pm

Where: Pokagon Band Community Center (27043 Potawatomi Trail, Dowagiac, MI 49047)

Light refreshments provided.

The Cisma Team will highlight 2023 accomplishments and new developments for 2024.

Our guest speaker, Robert Miller (MDARD Invasive Species Prevention and Response Specialist), will provide important updates on spotted lanternfly and what to expect if the pest arrives in Southwest Michigan.

If you have any questions please email SWxSW Corner Cisma Coordinator, Alex Florian at invasivesed@vanburencd.org.

The invitation poster has a dark green background with a subtle pattern of water lilies. At the top, the text "YOU'RE INVITED!" is written in white, followed by "SWXSW CORNER CISMA ANNUAL MEETING" in a larger, white, serif font. In the center, there is a circular inset showing a map of Michigan with the SWxSW CORNERCISMA logo overlaid. Below the map, the text "SWxSW CORNERCISMA" is written in white. At the bottom of the poster, there is a dark brown section with white text that reads: "Join us to celebrate Cisma 2023 accomplishments and look forward to 2024! Rob Miller of MDARD will discuss the current state of spotted lanternfly near our area, and what to expect if it arrives in SW MI. Light refreshments provided. February 16, 2024 | 1:00 - 3:00 PM Pokagon Band Community Center | 27043 Potawatomi Trail, Dowagiac, MI Please RSVP by February 9. InvasivesEd@VanBurenCD.org or call 269-633-9044."



Van Buren Conservation District

December 2023 MAEAP Board Report

Prepared: January 2024

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: 44.3% of required assessments completed

11.3% of verifications

Activities, Accomplishments, & Challenges

1. 12/11 – MAEAP Re-Assessment – Decatur
2. 12/12 – MAEAP New-Visit – Decatur
3. 12/13 – MAEAP New-Assessment – Paw Paw
4. 12/15 – Pull boards from Drainage Water Management Structures with Carlie
5. 12/18 – MAEAP New-Visit – Paw Paw
6. 12/20 – MAEAP Re-Assessment – Lawton

Meetings/Trainings Attended

1. 12/1 – Lawton Wellhead Protection Meeting – Lawton Village Hall
2. 12/4-12/6 – MACD Winter Conference
3. 12/7 – State/Provincial Envirothon Zoom Meeting
4. 12/8 – Ag Team Meeting
5. 12/19 – Farming for the Future planning meeting



Van Buren Conservation District

December 2023 MAEAP Board Report

Prepared: January 2024

Staff: Kyle Mead



A*Syst Type	Monthly A*Systs	Fiscal Year to Date A*Systs
Farm*A*Systs:	3	10
Orchard*A*Systs:	1	23
Greenhouse*A*Systs:		
Nursery*A*Systs:		
Crop*A*Systs:	2	3
Livestock*A*Systs:		1
FWHP*A*Systs:		2
Total Assessments Completed (always year to date):	6	39/ 88 Goal
On Farm Risk Reductions (always year to date):	3	32 / 150 Goal
MAEAP Verifications (always year to date):	0	8 completed YTD (2 FAS, 3 CAS, 1 LAS, 2 FWH) 71 Goal

Photos



Van Buren Conservation District:
December 2023 NACD Technical Assistance
Board Report
Prepared January 2024
Staff: Lucas Hartman



Highlights

Van Buren Conservation District has been awarded 12 additional months of funding for two conservation technicians to assist NRCS staff with Farm Bill Programs. This award comes from the Technical Assistance and Outreach grant administered by the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD).

Activities & Accomplishments

1. Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)
 - a. Payments for and certification of conservation practices will continue into 1st quarter of 2024
 - i. This includes payments for agronomic practices completed in 2023 and planning activities scheduled for winter of 2023-2024.
 - b. More than 50 ew applications have been submitted
2. Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)
 - a. Payment processing for existing contracts will continue into the 1st quarter of 2024.
 - b. Paw Paw field office is still awaiting program information for the 2024 application cycle.
 - i. Field office is currently accepting applications and can begin planning with landowners before program instructions have been released.
3. Conservation Operations Technical Assistance (CoTA)
 - a. Conservation planning for South Haven Regional Airport
 - i. Regional Airport authority has unique approach maintenance requirements that include minimizing wildlife cover, and vegetation height.
 - ii. The Airport Authority will have full control of the lands requiring management in summer of 2024.

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).

New Grant Proposals Submitted

1. Van Buren Conservation District has been selected for funding under the "Technical Assistance & Outreach" Grant from NACD



Van Buren Conservation District:
December 2023 NACD Technical Assistance
Board Report
Prepared January 2024
Staff: Lucas Hartman



- a. This grant will provide the conservation district with funding to employ two conservation technicians to assist NRCS staff with Farm Bill Programs, including EQIP CSP and general assistance with natural resource concerns.
- b. This award will provide ~12 months of additional funding



Van Buren Conservation District
December 2024 NRCS CT Board Report
Prepared: January 2024
Staff: Gabriel Francisco



Activities & Accomplishments

December was full of end of the year festivities. I would like to wish everyone a happy and warm holiday season, hoping that it brings you joy as you are surrounded with family and friends. While it may seem that at this time of the year focus goes toward the family first and foremost, I along with the rest of the Conservation District staff have been hard at work getting things together to start this next year on the right foot. Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) clients are getting paid, and Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)/ ACT NOW clients are rapidly getting signed up. Conservation planning and assistance is on track to be at an all time high this year for Van Buren County!

Additionally, I have had some great news about two of the larger grants (both through the National Association of Conservation Districts) that I have been busy working on for the past few months. We are happy to announce that our submission for the Conservation Technical Assistance & Outreach Grant that Lucas and I worked on has officially been accepted for funding. Our submission to the Climate Smart Commodities grant has officially made it to the second application round, with a final due date of March 15.

Meetings/Trainings Attended and Farm Visited

1. 12/1 - Farm Visit for E. Coli Testing and Tracking
2. 12/4 - Van Buren Youth Fair Board Meeting
3. 12/8 - Conservation District Ag. Team Meeting
4. 12/12 - Farming for the Future Speaker Meeting. Nick and Annie Rodgers of Redleg Farm
5. 12/15 - Check-in Meeting with Emilly and Kim
6. 12/18 - Livestock Systems MAEAP Assessment in Bloomingdale
7. 12/28 - Farmer Office Visit (Pasture Reseeding, Access Road)
8. 12/29 - Climate Smart Commodities Grant Round 2 Follow-Up Meeting

New Grant Proposals Submitted

1. N/A

Upcoming Activities

1. Michigan Sheep Producers Shepherds Weekend - January 6th
2. Climate Smart Commodities Grant Round 2 Webinar - January 11th
3. Sustain our Great Lakes Webinar and FAQ session - January 17th
4. Van Buren Conservation District Strategy Meeting - January 31st



Van Buren Conservation District
December 2024 NRCS CT Board Report
Prepared: January 2024
Staff: Gabriel Francisco



5. Presenter for Van Buren Conservation District's Backyard Symposium – Backyard Poultry – February 8th
6. Presenter at Ohio Ecological Food and Farming Conference – Draft Animal Farming – February 17th
7. Farming for the Future Track Lead – Livestock/ Grazing – March 13th

Photos



Van Buren Conservation District
December 2024 NRCS CT Board Report
Prepared: January 2024
Staff: Gabriel Francisco



Christmas Scenes from Thunderfoot Farm



Van Buren Conservation District
December 2023 Outreach Board Report
Prepared 12/29/2023
Staff: **Jacob Diljak**

Highlights

Calendars were delivered to partners and the public. 2024 Food, Farm, & Fun Guide is nearing its first draft. Fundraising and donation opportunities were expanded through website work and Tree Sale updates.

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: writing, review, editing
5. VBCD Newsletter: drafting, sending
6. Tree Sale: donation opportunities, promotion, website and order form work
7. 2023 Annual Report: draft work with designer, editing
8. 2024 VBCD Calendars: deliveries
9. 2024 Food, Farm, & Fun Guide: advertiser work, rough draft, edits
10. Public Green Space Project: ongoing work
11. Backyard Symposium: promotion, speaker coordination, planning
12. Billboards: 2024 planning
13. Farming for the Future: review of promotional work
14. 80th Anniversary: logo updates, planning
15. Branding: email signatures

Meetings/Trainings Attended

1. Staff meetings (12/5, 12/12, 12/19, 12/26)
2. Admin team meeting (12/8)
3. Outreach Check-In (12/20)
4. 1:1 Outreach Check-In (12/8, 12/22)
5. Village of Decatur Regular Village Council Meeting (12/4)
6. Keeler Township Regular Township Board Meeting (12/5)
7. Water Quality Team Water Sampling Photography (12/7) **pictured**
8. Backyard Symposium Meeting (12/12)
9. 80th Anniversary Logo Update (12/27)
10. Adobe: Building Brand Creativity, Consistency, and Communications (12/27)
11. Backyard Symposium Check-In (12/28)
12. Vehicle Maintenance (12/29)



Van Buren Conservation District
 December 2023 Outreach Board Report
 Prepared 12/29/2023
 Staff: Jacob Diljak

New Grant Proposals Submitted

1. NA

Upcoming Activities

1. Training on Zoom Webinar Setup (1/8)
2. Backyard Symposium Tech Check (1/18, 1/29, 1/30)
3. VBCD Strategy Meeting (1/31)

	Trends	Content	Audience
Facebook	5,784 People Reached	24 Posts	2,605 Page Followers (9 ↑)
Instagram	147 People Reached	22 Posts	250 Followers (6 ↑)
LinkedIn	18 Impressions	2 Posts	50 Followers (0 ↑)
YouTube	Total Views	-	1,080 Subscribers (10 ↑)
TikTok	0 Likes	1 Post	53 Followers (2 ↑)

Event Category	Number of Events	Impressions
Miscellaneous	2	49
VBCD Events	0	0
Farmers Markets	0	0



Van Buren Conservation District
December 2023 Outreach Board Report
Prepared 12/29/2023
Staff: Jacob Diljak



Water Quality Project Manager Erin Fuller and Senior Conservation Specialist Colleen Forestieri taking measurements at the drainage water control structure in Hartford Township (12/7). This project with partners measures farm runoff and water management on farm fields.

Produce Safety Monthly Report

December 1, 2023 – December 31, 2023



Completed

- GLEXPO (12/5 – 12/7)
- Virtual PSA Training (12/11)
- Newsletter Planning Meeting (12/12)
- MIFFS Conference Planning Meeting (12/18)
- ValleyHUB Conference Planning Meeting (12/20)
- Work on Presentation for MIFFS Meeting
- Work on Newsletter article on controlled environmental growing
- Work on newsletter article on wildlife mitigation in the off season
- Help with the Produce Safety Team and ValleyHUB team presentation on food safety and the Produce Safety Program
- Work with growers on their presentation about working with me for the ValleyHUB Conference
- Work to develop food safety plans for five more farms.
- Work on completing HAACP training
- Ongoing communications with growers



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



Highlights

Resource Recovery slowed down as collection season planning wrapped and the holiday season commenced. December focused on education and planning for the exciting Recycling Infrastructure grants to come that will make improvements to several transfer stations in Van Buren County.

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 December 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 December 2023
6. Resupplied Battery Recycling Stations
7. Held discussions and planning for EGLE Infrastructure grant
8. Scheduled Presentations and developed lesson plans with schools for youth recycling education
9. Assisted in 2024 calendar deliveries to municipalities
10. Compiled summary data to share for the Materials Management Community Engagement Report

Meetings/Trainings Attended

1. 12/6/2023 - West Michigan Sustainable Business Forum Food Waste Road Map
2. 12/8/2023 - Michigan Green Schools Coordinator Meeting
3. 12/8/2023 - Admin team meeting
4. 12/26/2023 - Staff Meeting

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