



Van Buren Conservation District
January 2024 Ag Conservation/Water Quality Projects Board Report
Prepared 2/14/24

Staff: Colleen Forestieri Erin Fuller Carlie Southland

Highlight

January is a great time to reflect on successes and challenges of the previous year. In 2023, with grant support, the Ag & Water Quality Team helped local farmers install over 3,300 acres of cover crops. These cover crops prevented 333 tons of sediment runoff to our lakes and streams. We provided \$105,000 in cost-share dollars to help farmers try conservation practices.

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

Activities & Accomplishments

1. Water sampling from tile drains and streams 1/4/24, 1/23/24, 1/24/24, 1/31/24
2. Farmer interviews
3. Farmer meetings 1/23/24
4. Tillage inventory data meeting with EGLE 1/30/24
5. Outreach planning
6. Farming for the Future conference planning meetings 1/16/24, 1/30/24
7. Quarterly report submitted

Upcoming Activities

1. Water sampling 2/14/24, 2/28/24
2. Farming for the Future conference planning meetings 2/15/24

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

Activities & Accomplishments

1. Continue outreach activities
2. Contributed edits to informational videos developed by UND
3. Farming for the Future conference planning meetings 1/16/24, 1/30/24
4. Quarterly report submitted

Upcoming Activities

1. Continue review of informational videos developed by UND
2. Continue planning education events for 2024



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3. Farming for the Future conference planning meetings 2/15/24

Other

Activities & Accomplishments

1. Weekly staff meetings
2. MI Natural Shoreline Partnership Outreach subcommittee 1/12/24
3. Water Quality Team mtg 1/16/24
4. Backyard Symposium planning
5. KBS LTAR Winter Summit Stakeholder Committee (Participant) - 1/19/24
6. VBCD Board meeting - 1/24/24
7. VBCD Strategic Planning - 1/31/24

Upcoming Activities

1. Introduction to Lakes class (Attendee)(Southland)
2. MI Natural Shoreline Partnership Outreach subcommittee (Participant) 2/6/24
3. Focus Group about food grade grains (Participant) 2/6/24
4. Clean Water Act webinar (Attendee) 2/8/24
5. Underground Innovations Grower Meeting (Attendee) 2/8/24
6. Michigan Corn Cover Crop Boot Camp (Speaking) 2/9/24
7. Soil & Water Conservation Society Seminar (Speaking) 3/8/24
8. Grant tracking

New Grant Proposals Submitted

1. none



SWxSW Corner Cisma

January 2024 Board Report

Prepared 02/05/2024

Staff: Alex Florian Abigale Bristol Jena Johnson

Highlights

The Cisma started off the New Year by reconnecting with new and old partners and establishing our foundation for the field season. At the annual Michigan Invasive Species Coalition (MISC) meeting, we shared space and ideas with fellow Cisma coordinators - grounding ourselves for the year. The field season has already begun to take shape as we complete the required permitting and begin scheduling events!

Activities & Accomplishments

1. Alex served on the MISC Annual Meeting planning committee
2. Finalized species prioritization tool with Species Prioritization Subcommittee
3. Abbie completed Road Commission 2023 report
4. Abbie completed National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permitting report
5. Revise data recording maps and systems

Meetings/Trainings Attended

1. MISC annual meeting
2. Webinar: Charting the Course for a Comprehensive Point-Intercept Database
3. The Stewardship Network Conference
4. Cisma Steering Committee meeting
5. VBCD Strategy meeting
6. Abbie and Alex interviewed by PhD student studying Cismas as an entity

Upcoming Activities

1. Cisma annual meeting
2. Backyard Symposium
3. State AIS management plan focus group
4. Winter Walk with a Naturalist
5. Farming For the Future
6. Niles Library Program





SWxSW Corner Cisma

January 2024 Board Report

Prepared 02/05/2024

Staff: Alex Florian Abigale Bristol Jena Johnson

7. Gobles Middle School program
8. Spotted Lanternfly Stakeholder meeting
9. VBDL Decatur plant presentation
10. Two Rivers Coalition monthly meeting
11. Camp Tamarack Conservation Committee Meeting
12. Berrien Conservation District Annual Meeting

New Grant Proposals Submitted

1. EGLE | Van Buren Conservation District Support | \$ 17,081.43 | expected decision date: Spring
 - a. Installing boat wash signs with tools at 3 lakes
 - b. No match

Species of the Month: Tree of Heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*)

Overview:

1. Can spread by sending out root suckers, or seeds.
2. Dioecious, meaning some trees are male, and others are female.
3. Spotted lanternfly strongly prefer trees of heaven over other potential host trees, making them an excellent place to look for SLF.

Identification:

1. Winter is the easiest time of year to look for tree of heaven, its branches have smooth, reddish brown bark and reach straight up. It also has large, obvious leaf scars.
2. Its branches are smooth, with no hairs, unlike sumac which is hairy
3. What looks to be a branch full of leaves is actually a single leaf, holding dozens of leaflets. The whole leaf can reach 4 feet in length. You can differentiate this tree from staghorn sumac by Tree of Heaven's leaflets, which have an extra rounded bump at the base.
4. The leaves smell like rotten peanut butter when crushed.





Van Buren Conservation District

January 2024 MAEAP Board Report

Prepared: February 2024

Staff: Kyle Mead



Highlights:

Winter is the meeting and tradeshow season. The specialist is gearing up for speaking engagements at various meetings, webinars and trade shows in SW Michigan. He is also setting up farmers for Verifications as far out as March when some return from warmer climates. In addition, the specialist is working with two other technicians to finalize an Envirothon competition for this year, the first since 2018. There is a lot of interest in Envirothon from teachers and youth leaders that have had teams in the past.

Percentage Completed: 46.6% of required assessments completed

16.9% of verifications

Activities, Accomplishments, & Challenges

1. 1/8 – St. Joe Conservation District MAEAP Tech Interviews
2. 1/11 – Verifications – Lawton/Decatur (4 Reverifications)
3. 1/12 – Assist farmer with WUR office
4. 1/17 – Assessment in Grand Junction
5. 1/25 – Pre-Assessment visit with Gabe – Texas Twp

Meetings/Trainings Attended

1. 1/10 – BYS Meeting in office
2. 1/16 – Farming for the Future planning meeting
3. 1/18 – Meeting with speaker for FftF
4. 1/19 – KBS Stakeholder Meeting – KBS
5. 1/29 – BYS check in
6. 1/30 – FftF check in
7. 1/31 – Envirothon Zoom

| A*Syst Type | Monthly A*Systs | Fiscal Year to Date A*Systs |
|---------------------|-----------------|-----------------------------|
| Farm*A*Systs: | 1 | 11 |
| Orchard*A*Systs: | 1 | 24 |
| Greenhouse*A*Systs: | | |



Van Buren Conservation District

January 2024 MAEAP Board Report

Prepared: February 2024

Staff: Kyle Mead



| | | |
|--|---|---|
| Nursery*A*Systs: | | |
| Crop*A*Systs: | | 3 |
| Livestock*A*Systs: | | 1 |
| FWHP*A*Systs: | | 2 |
| Total Assessments Completed (always year to date): | 3 | 41/ 88 Goal |
| On Farm Risk Reductions (always year to date): | | 32 / 150 Goal |
| MAEAP Verifications (always year to date): | 4 | 12 completed YTD (3 FAS, 6 CAS, 1 LAS, 2 FWH) 71 Goal |

Photos



Van Buren Conservation District
January 2024 National Association of
Conservation Districts (NACD) Technical
Assistance & Outreach Board Report
Prepared February 16, 2024
Staff: Lucas Hartman Gabriel Francisco



Highlights

Kicking off 2024 has been a whirlwind for Lucas and Gabe. A large number of EQIP, ACT-Now, and High-Tunnel applications have been submitted by area residents and now we face the task of getting them properly documented and into the system! Can't wait to start seeing all these fantastic ideas surrounding conservation happening in our community!

Activities & Accomplishments

1. Gabe's monthly totals
 - a. 6 Act-Now Applications Ranked
 - b. 12 New conservation practices designed
 - c. Plans assisted in Jan. 2024 include 140 acres of land with improved management
2. Lucas' monthly totals
 - a. 4 Act-Now Applications Ranked
 - b. 14 new conservation practices designed
 - c. 4 CSP enhancements certified
 - d. 2 EQIP practices certified

Meetings/Trainings Attended

1. Jan. 4 - Office Visits (x2) with Gabe. South Haven Farm and Paw Paw Farm
2. Jan. 6 - Gabe attends Michigan Shepherds Weekend
3. Jan. 9 - Office Visit with Gabe. Porter Township Farm
4. Jan. 11 - Climate Smart Commodities Grant Webinar
5. Jan. 16 - Farming For the Future Planning Meeting
6. Jan 18 - Meeting with Joseph Lazzari, Farming for the Future speaker
7. Jan. 19 - MIFFS Conservation District Organization
8. Jan. 22 - Office Visit with Gabe. Bloomingdale Farm
9. Jan 25 - MAEAP Assessment. Porter Township Farm
10. Jan. 26 - Cons Assist with Gabe. Gobles Farm
11. Jan. 30 - Farming for the Future Planning Meeting
12. Jan. 31 - VBCD Strategy Meeting



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Grant Deliverables Tracking

| Predicted Accomplishments | Fiscal Year Progress to Date |
|--|------------------------------|
| 30 Contracts Obligated | 0/30 |
| 70 Practices/enhancements certified (implemented) | 6/70 |
| 50 Plans Assisted | 12/50 |
| 4 Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) Presentations Given | X/4 |
| 2,000 Acres with Improved Management | 0/2,000 |
| 3,500 Acres with Practices Implemented | 0/3,500 |
| 150 Clients Reached | 12/150 |
| 80 New Producers Reached | 4/80 |
| 50 Historically Underserved Producers Reached | 5/50 |
| 500 Participants at Educational Presentations | X/500 |
| 4 New Coalitions or Partnerships | 2/4 |

New Grant Proposals Submitted

1. Climate Smart Commodities Grant is currently being written. Final Submission date is March 15, 2024 with a hope to hear back by June 1, 2024.

Upcoming Activities

1. Gabe at OEFFA Conference - Gabe will be presenting at the 2024 Ohio Ecological Food and Farming Association annual conference in Newark, Ohio on the subject of Draft Animal Farming as well as some of the work he has been doing around his farm on his NRCS EQIP contract.
2. Farming for the Future Grazing, and forestry sessions will be hosted/moderated by NACD grant funded staff. Discussions will include information on Farm Bill program applicability.



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Photos



Gabe visiting a farm in Paw Paw.



Van Buren Conservation District

January 2024 Outreach Board Report

Prepared 1/31/2024

Staff: **Jacob Diljak**

Highlights

The VBCD Tree Sale kicked off! Our largest fundraiser started with a bang with over 60 orders in under a month. Be sure to register for our free webinar, the Backyard Symposium, to hear our speakers talk about farming and gardening resources, backyard poultry, and community gardens.

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. VBCD Newsletter: drafting, sending
5. 80th Anniversary: logo use review, social media planning, photography planning
6. Tree Sale: social media and advertising, customer help, website fixes, stock monitoring, seedling wrapping planning
7. 2023 Annual Report: draft edits, completion
8. 2024 Food, Farm, & Fun Guide: advertiser and festival work, ad design, rough draft editing
9. Public Green Space Project: inventory review, data gathering
10. Backyard Symposium: planning, promotion, speaker and host coordination
11. Email Signature Project: research, troubleshooting, execution
12. MAEAP: branding kit creation
13. Water Screening: resource and information kit creation, ordering of supplies, promotion
14. Farming for the Future: publication edits and review

Meetings/Trainings Attended

1. Staff meetings (1/9, 1/16, 1/23, 1/30)
2. Admin team meetings (1/5)
3. Outreach Check-In (1/17)
4. 1:1 Outreach Check-In (1/12, 1/26)
5. Training on Zoom Webinar Setup (1/8)
6. Beginning Farmer Meeting (1/10)
7. Career Day Discussion (1/16)
8. Backyard Symposium Tech Check (1/18, 1/29, 1/30)
9. Backyard Symposium Meeting (1/22)
10. VBCD Strategy Meeting (1/31)



Van Buren Conservation District

January 2024 Outreach Board Report

Prepared 1/31/2024

Staff: **Jacob Diljak**

New Grant Proposals Submitted

1. NA

Upcoming Activities

1. Backyard Symposium (2/5-2/8)
2. Lawton Middle School Career Day Presentation (2/8)
3. Mid-Year Review (2/9)
4. SWxSW Corner CISMA Annual Meeting (2/16)
5. VBCD Staff Team Building Day (2/21)

| | Trends | Content | Audience |
|-----------|-----------------------|----------|------------------------------|
| Facebook | 18,239 People Reached | 33 Posts | 2,276 Page Followers (329 ↑) |
| Instagram | 155 People Reached | 28 Posts | 258 Followers (8 ↑) |
| LinkedIn | 38 Impressions | 2 Posts | 51 Followers (1 ↑) |
| YouTube | Total Views | - | 1,100 Subscribers (20 ↑) |
| TikTok | 584 Likes | 0 Posts | 55 Followers (2 ↑)53 |

| Event Category | Number of Events | Impressions |
|-----------------|------------------|-------------|
| Miscellaneous | 1 | 10 |
| VBCD Events | 0 | 0 |
| Farmers Markets | 0 | 0 |



Van Buren Conservation District
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Staff: **Jacob Diljak**



Conservation Technician Lucas Hartman (left) and Administrator Kim Sinclair (right) posing for photos for the upcoming Lawton Middle School Career Day presentation (1/22/2024).



Van Buren Conservation District
January 2024 Resource Recovery Board Report
Prepared February 2024
Staff: Kalli Marshall



Highlights

The New Year started strong with the initiation of Materials Management Planning as a part of the new amendment to Part 115 Legislation. Van Buren County is excited to work together on a regional plan with Southwest Michigan Planning Commission helping lead the way. This Kalli also educated our residents at a presentation at Liberty Hyde Bailey Museum and Gobles Middle School.

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 January 2024
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 January 2024
6. Submitted amendment for Electronics Recycling Grant
7. Held discussions and planning for EGLE Infrastructure grant
8. Scheduled Presentations and developed lesson plans with schools for youth recycling education
9. Connected with region and county for Materials Management Planning
10. Updated Recycling Where to Recycle webpages for VBCD website

Meetings/Trainings Attended

1. 1/2/2024 - Materials Management Planning Overview Meeting
2. 1/5/2024, 1/10/2024 - Admin team Meeting
3. 1/9/2024, 1/16/2024, 1/23/2024, 1/30/2024 - Staff Meeting
4. 1/10/2024, 1/24/2024 - Paw Paw Township Infrastructure Grant Project
5. 1/10/2024, 1/24/2024 - Southwest Michigan Materials Management Planning
6. 1/11/2024 - Household Hazardous Waste Roundtable
7. 1/16/2024 - Bloomingdale Township Infrastructure Grant
8. 1/16/2024 - Arlington Township Infrastructure Grant
9. 1/17/2024 - Decatur Infrastructure Grant
10. 1/22/2024 - Covert Township Infrastructure Grant
11. 1/22/2024 - The Recycling Partnership Grant Onboarding
12. 1/24/2024 - Liberty Hyde Bailey Recycling Presentation
13. 1/29/2024 - Gobles Middle School Recycling Education
14. 1/30/2024 - VBCD Strategy Meeting
15. 1/31/2024 - By the Numbers The Recycling Partnership Webinar
16. 1/31/2024 - Materials Recovery Facility Regional Discussion



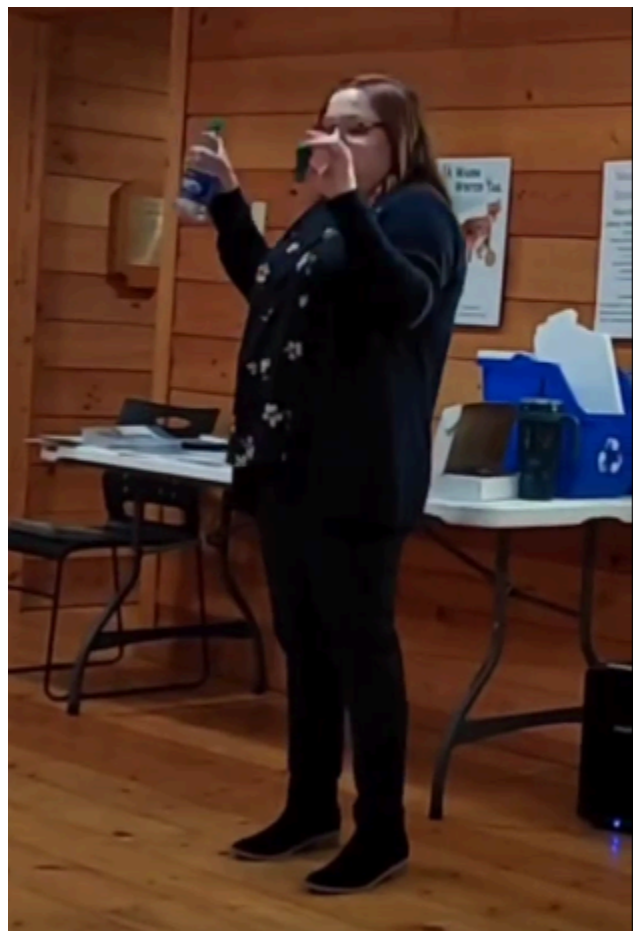
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New Grant Proposals Submitted

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



Kalli Marshall, Presenting at Liberty Hyde Bailey Museum