



Van Buren Conservation District
February 2024 Ag Conservation/Water Quality Projects Board Report
Prepared 3/7/24

Staff: Colleen Forestieri Erin Fuller Carlie Southland

Highlight

In February, the Ag & Water Quality Team staff attended and spoke at several workshops and conferences, as well as prepared for future conferences and field days that we will be hosting. Additionally, we were invited to partner on a grant application with the Sand County Foundation: “Expanding the impact of farmer-led groups: A Michigan pilot to advance climate-smart agriculture.”

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

Activities & Accomplishments

1. Water sampling from tile drains and streams 2/14/24, 2/28/24
2. Farmer interviews
3. Farmer meetings 2/20/24
4. Outreach planning
5. Farming for the Future conference planning meetings 2/15/24, 2/27/24
6. Quarterly report submitted

Upcoming Activities

1. Water sampling 3/5/24 (storm sample), 3/13/24, 3/27/24
2. Farming for the Future conference 3/13/24

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 2/15/24, 2/27/24
4. Quarterly report submitted

Upcoming Activities

1. Continue planning education events for 2024
2. Farming for the Future conference 3/13/24



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Other

Activities & Accomplishments

1. Weekly staff meetings
2. MI Natural Shoreline Partnership Outreach subcommittee (Participant) 2/6/24
3. Backyard Symposium
4. Focus Group about food grade grains (Participant) 2/6/24
5. MI Natural Shoreline Partnership Outreach subcommittee 2/6/24
6. MI Natural Shoreline Partnership business meeting 2/7/24
7. Underground Innovations Grower Meeting (Attendee) 2/7/24
8. Michigan Corn Cover Crop Boot Camp (Speaking) 2/8/24
9. Clean Water Act webinar (Attendee) 2/8/24
10. MACD funding update meeting (Participant) 2/20/23
11. Staff team building day 2/21/24
12. Water Quality Team mtg 2/27/24
13. Introduction to Lakes class (Attendee)(Southland)
14. Prairie strip on-farm project coordination
15. Develop social media posts

Upcoming Activities

1. Introduction to Lakes class (Attendee)(Southland)
2. Prairie strip on-farm project meeting 3/6/24
3. Soil & Water Conservation Society Seminar (Speaking) 3/8/24
4. Climate smart advisory group meeting 3/19/24
5. Grant tracking

New Grant Proposals Submitted

1. "Expanding the impact of farmer-led groups: A Michigan pilot to advance climate-smart agriculture" (VBCD would be a subcontractor to the Sand County Foundation) (NFWF-Conservation Partners Program)



SWxSW Corner Cisma

February 2024 Board Report

Prepared 03-06-2024

Staff: [Alex Florian](#) [Abigale Bristol](#) [Jena Johnson](#)

Highlights

The SWxSW Corner Cisma Team held our annual meeting to inform the public about current Cisma projects. In this transitional time, we wrapped up permitting and reporting needs from 2023, held and attended meetings, and treated invasive shrubs on partner properties. As our reflection of 2023 comes to a close, we are looking ahead to a full and productive field season!

Activities & Accomplishments

1. Cisma Annual Meeting
2. Backyard Symposium
3. Aquatic Invasive Species Management Plan Focus Group
4. Scheduled outreach events for Summer of 2024
5. Completed surveys of Van Buren County drains
6. Chikaming Open Lands for-hire work
7. Grant-funded shrub treatments in high quality wetlands

Meetings/Trainings Attended

1. Invasive Species Forum
2. Met with Paw Paw Middle school teacher about pollinator planting
3. Berrien Conservation District Annual Meeting
4. Reviewed and revised field-season timeline
5. Posted job description for 2024 Strike Team
6. Two Rivers Coalition monthly meeting
7. Camp Tamarack Conservation Committee Meeting

Upcoming Activities

1. MI Paddle Stewards Spring 2024 partner meeting
2. Winter Walk with a Naturalist
3. Farming For the Future



SWxSW Corner Cisma

February 2024 Board Report

Prepared 03-06-2024

Staff: Alex Florian Abigale Bristol Jena Johnson

4. Niles Library Program
5. Cisma Steering Committee Meeting
6. Gobles Middle School program
7. Spotted Lanternfly Stakeholder meeting
8. VBDL Decatur plant presentation
9. Two Rivers Coalition monthly meeting
10. Tree sale
11. Spring EFB Collaborative Meeting
12. Liberty Hyde Bailey museum presentation
13. Michigan Lakes and Streams Annual Conference
14. Interview Strike Team Applicants

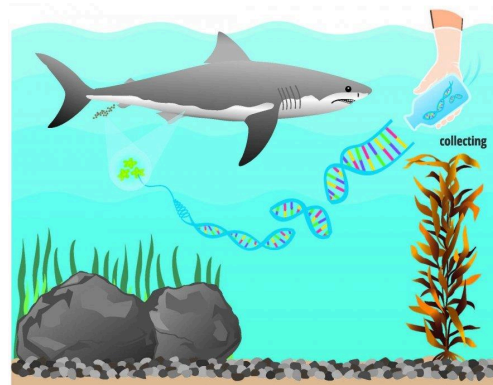
New Grant Proposals Submitted

1. None

Concept of the Month: What is eDNA?

Overview:

1. When organisms shed or excrete things, they leave behind traces of their presence, called "environmental DNA" or "eDNA". It could come from an organism's feces, urine, skin, scales, or mucus. In aquatic systems, the DNA contained in these cells mixes throughout the water column, and can be detected at very low concentrations by modern DNA sequencing technology. It is sensitive enough to detect the presence of a single fish in a river! However, it is also prone to false positives because of this high sensitivity. Thus, it is important that many samples are taken to ensure one positive is a true positive. This powerful tool is used to monitor for asian carp in Michigan's rivers and hemlock woolly adelgid in the northern lower peninsula.
2. Image: Environmental DNA collection and sequencing can detect the general presence of white sharks. Credit: Chris Jerde





Van Buren Conservation District

February 2024 MAEAP Board Report

Prepared: March 2024

Staff: Kyle Mead



Highlights:

The specialist participated in a tradeshow in Benton Harbor that targets fruit and vegetable growers. He shared a booth with other technicians from the area and talked to several farmers. There were also several planning meetings throughout the month as the team gears up for Farming for the Future in March and then for Michigan Envirothon as the specialist helped plan the March regional competitions. Between meetings, the specialist worked to get several different growers ready for Verifications that are scheduled for March as well.

Percentage Completed: 56.8% of required assessments completed

16.9% of verifications

Activities, Accomplishments, & Challenges

1. 2/6 – Backyard Symposium presentation
2. 2/7-2/8 – SWM Hort Days – Benton Harbor
3. 2/14 – Met with farmer to finish paperwork for MAEAP Verification
4. 2/22 – Pre-verification meeting with grower
5. 2/23 – Grower WUR in office

Meetings/Trainings Attended

1. 2/2 – Lawton Wellhead protection meeting – Lawton village hall
2. 2/15 – Farming for future meeting
3. 2/16 – Envirothon Zoom meeting
4. 2/20 – MACD Zoom meeting – MAEAP Grant
5. 2/21 – Tech Zoom meeting – MAEAP Grant follow up to MACD zoom
6. 2/26 – Met with new MBG Agronomist about MAEAP
7. 2/27 – FFF Meeting
8. 2/29 – Envirothon Zoom meeting



Van Buren Conservation District

February 2024 MAEAP Board Report

Prepared: March 2024

Staff: Kyle Mead



A*Syst Type	Monthly A*Systs	Fiscal Year to Date A*Systs
Farm*A*Systs:	5	16
Orchard*A*Systs:	4	28
Greenhouse*A*Systs:		
Nursery*A*Systs:		
Crop*A*Systs:		3
Livestock*A*Systs:		1
FWHP*A*Systs:		2
Total Assessments Completed (always year to date):	9	50/ 88 Goal
On Farm Risk Reductions (always year to date):		32 / 150 Goal
MAEAP Verifications (always year to date):		12 completed YTD (3 FAS, 6 CAS, 1 LAS, 2 FWH) 71 Goal

Photos



Van Buren Conservation District
February 2024 National Association of
Conservation Districts (NACD) Technical
Assistance & Outreach Board Report
Prepared March 19, 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. Now, the team faces 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. 2 Act-Now Applications Ranked
 - b. 4 New conservation practices designed
 - c. Plans assisted in Feb. 2024 include 56 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. 2/1/24 - Gabe Farm Visit - Waverly Township
2. 2/2/24 - Gabe Well Test - Almena Township
3. 2/5/24 - Backyard Symposium - Lucas Presentation
4. 2/8/24 - Backyard Symposium - Gabe Presentation
5. 2/15/24 - 2/17/24 - Ohio Ecological Food and Farming Conference - Gabe Presentation
6. 2/22/24 - Gabe Farm Visit - Scotts Michigan
7. 2/23/24 - Gabe Volunteer Appreciation Planning
8. 2/27/24 - Farming For the Future Planning 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	16/50
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	22/150
80 New Producers Reached	8/80
50 Historically Underserved Producers Reached	6/50
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. 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.
2. Grazing Day will be September 19, 2024



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Photos



Gabe visiting a farm in Paw Paw.



Van Buren Conservation District
February 2024 Outreach Board Report
Prepared 2/29/2024
Staff: **Jacob Diljak**

Highlights

Free, year-round nitrite and nitrate water screening is available at the VBCD office! If you have not gotten our 2023 Annual Report, visit our office or go to VanBurenCD.org/annual-reports. Our Backyard Symposium recordings are now available on our YouTube channel at www.YouTube.com/c/VanBurenCD

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, writing
5. VBCD Newsletter: drafting, sending
6. Tree Sale: customer and stock management
7. 2023 Annual Report: deliveries
8. 2024 Food, Farm, & Fun Guide: draft work
9. Water Screening: program resource and instruction recreation, promotion
10. River Clean Up: planning
11. Public Outreach Planning: social media analytics and planning
12. Winter Walk with a Naturalist: promotion and outreach
13. Youth Hunt: sponsorship outreach work
14. Farming for the Future: promotional and outreach material review and edits
15. Local Work Group: promotional input
16. Paw Paw Middle School Native Garden Project: group coordination, information gathering, and planning
17. Backyard Symposium: training, videography and posting
18. Branding: email signature update

Meetings/Trainings Attended

1. Staff meetings (2/6, 2/13, 2/20, 2/27)
2. Admin team meetings (2/7)
3. Outreach Check-In (2/20)
4. Outreach 1:1 (2/9, 2/23)
5. NRCS Site Visit: Photography (2/1) **pictured**
6. Backyard Symposium (2/5-2/8)
7. DNR Recreation Grant Application Workshop (2/7)



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 Staff: **Jacob Diljak**

8. Lawton Middle School Career Day (2/8) **pictured**
9. Mid-Year Review (2/9)
10. Water Screening Awareness Meeting (2/12)
11. YouTube Posting Training (2/13)
12. Hamilton Township Regular Board Meeting (2/13)
13. SWxSW Corner CISMA Annual Meeting (2/16)
14. VBCD Team Building Day (2/21)
15. Material Management Planning (2/22)
16. Recycling Flyers Training (2/22)

New Grant Proposals Submitted

1. NA

Upcoming Activities

1. Farming for the Future (3/13)
2. Two Rivers Coalition Board Meeting (3/19)

	Trends	Content	Audience
Facebook	10,850 People Reached	28 Posts	2,295 Page Followers (19 ↑)
Instagram	173 People Reached	23 Posts	267 Followers (9 ↑)
LinkedIn	7 Impressions	0 Posts	51 Followers (0 ↑)
YouTube	1,700 Total Views	4 Videos	1,122 Subscribers (22 ↑)
TikTok	587 Likes	0 Posts	57 Followers (4 ↑)

Event Category	Number of Events	Impressions
Miscellaneous	2	337
VBCD Events	2	53
Farmers Markets	0	0



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Conservation Technician Gabriel Francisco conducting a site visit to help a Van Buren County farm access federal funding to address erosion and other natural resource concerns (2/1).



Recycling & Materials Management Coordinator Kalli Marshall sharing her career and job duties during Career Day to Lawton Middle School Students (2/8).

Produce Safety Monthly Report

February 1, 2024 – February 29, 2024



Completed

- Risks in Controller Environment Agriculture Article MIOFPS Newsletter (2/2)
- Newsletter Planning Meeting (2/5)
- Northbay Presentation Prep Meeting (2/5)
- SW Horticulture Days (2/7 – 2/8)
- MIFFS Presentation Prep Meeting (2/7)
- Northbay presentation Prep Meeting (2/7)
- Northbay Food Safety Meeting Grand Rapids (2/14)
- NCR FSMA Listening Session (2/15)
- In-person Produce Safety Grower Training Kent County (2/20)
- Farm Visit Bangor (3/21)
- PSA Grower Training Virtual (2/22)
- PS Tech Chats (2/23)
- MIOFPS Monthly Huddle (2/23)
- MIFMA Conference East Lansing (2/27)
- Reisters Grower Meeting South Haven (2/28)
- BCCD Annual Meeting (2/29)

Upcoming

- Virtual PSA Grower Training (3/4)
- MIFFS Conference (3/9)
- In-Person PSA Grower Training Oceana County (3/12)



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



Highlights

February was a month of preparation, learning, and educating. Materials Management Planning has been progressing with meetings to keep Van Buren County on track and Kalli has been busy attending meetings and training to learn about the process. For the second year, Kalli and Jacob attended Lawton Middle School Career Day to teach students about their jobs. Paw Paw Middle School Michigan Green School application was reviewed and approved this month, the only 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 February 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 February 2024
6. Held discussions and planning for EGLE Infrastructure grant
7. Scheduled presentations and developed lesson plans with schools for youth recycling education
8. Connected with region and county for Materials Management Planning
9. Updated 'Where to Recycle' webpages for VBCD website
10. Approved Paw Paw Middle School Michigan Green School Application
11. Worked with waste haulers and materials recovery facilities for detailed education
12. Refreshed Battery Recycling Stations at Libraries
13. Began prepping for Recycling Collections and taking call from residents with questions and sign ups
14. Assisted with Annual Report Deliveries to municipalities
15. Worked on press release for recycling infrastructure grant
16. Registered for HazWoper Refresher training
17. Connected with partner counties to assist with Recycling Infrastructure Grants

Meetings/Trainings Attended

1. 2/1/2024 - South Haven/ Geneva Township Infrastructure Grant Meeting
2. 2/6/2024, 2/20/2024, 2/27/2024 - Staff Meeting
3. 2/6/2024 - Mid Year Review
4. 2/6/2024 - Materials Recovery Facility Discussion
5. 2/7/2024 - Southwest Michigan Materials Management Meeting
6. 2/7/2024 - Backyard Symposium Host
7. 2/8/2024 - Lawton Middle School Career Day
8. 2/9/2024 - Hartford Elementary Recycling education Presentation



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9. 2/13/2024 - Materials Management Virtual Conference
10. 2/20/2024 - MACD Update Webinar
11. 2/21/2024 - VBCD Team Staff Building day
12. 2/22/2024 - The Recycling Partnership Grant Check In
13. 2/23/2024 - EGLE Infrastructure Grant Financial Planning
14. 2/23/2024 - Resource Recovery Admin Meeting
15. 2/27/2024, 2/29/2024 - Hartford Elementary Parent/Teacher Conferences
16. 2/28/2024 - West Michigan Materials Management Coalition Meeting
17. 2/28/2024 - Materials Management Planning Workgroup Q&A Session EGLE

New Grant Proposals Submitted

1. NA

Upcoming Activities

1. Research/develop A*Syst Program booklets for restaurants, organizations, growers, schools, homes, municipalities
2. Hang Recycle, MI signs somewhere impactful
3. Hartford School Recycling Collaboration



Kalli Marshall, Presenting at Lawton Middle School Career Day