



Van Buren Conservation District

December 2023 Program Update

Submitted by *Emilly Hickmott, Executive Director*

As 2023 winds down, District staff is grateful for another great year serving Van Buren County and Southwest Michigan, and we are looking forward to an impactful 2024. We anticipate distributing our 2023 annual report in early February so that you can celebrate with us all that we've accomplished with your support and partnership. Thank you for continuing to work with us as we all seek to make Van Buren County an ever-better place to live, work, and play.

In the meantime, our annual Tree Seedling Sale starts next week; pre-orders will be accepted January 1st through March 31st with early April pick up. Find more details on our website: www.VanBurenCD.org/Shop
Below, we've linked a litter reduction grant opportunity and floodplain webinars that may be of interest to you. If there is a service, information, or event that you're hoping to see from the District, please don't hesitate to reach out and share your ideas and questions. **Happy New Year!**

Local government grants to reduce cigarette litter:

Organization: Keep America Beautiful

Grant: Cigarette Litter Prevention Program (CLPP) Grant

Monetary range: \$5,000 – \$20,000

Application period: December 15, 2023 – February 15, 2024

Grants announced and executed: March 2024

Description: The Keep America Beautiful Cigarette Litter Prevention Program helps reduce pollution in American communities by collecting cigarette waste from public spaces and waterways and recycling it. Since its inception in 2003, the program has been implemented in more than 1,800 communities across the nation, achieving an average of 50% reduction in cigarette waste. Expenses eligible for grant support include purchasing public receptacles for cigarette litter collection, marketing costs, and costs associated with administering the program, including salaries.

Applicants will be required to provide a budget and an accompanying rationale in their applications.

Learn more here: <https://kab.org/beautification/community-grants/>

[The Local Leaders Webinar Series](#) is dedicated to helping Michigan's local officials and community leaders gain a better understanding of the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) and the environmental regulations that affect their communities. Two new floodplain webinars (January 23 and January 30) will be added to the series and recordings will be posted online.

Save the Date, You're Invited: The SWxSW Corner Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area (CISMA) Annual Meeting will be held on Friday, February 16 at 1:00 PM at the Pokagon Band Community Center in Dowagiac.

Program Updates:

- **Ag Conservation/Water Quality Projects** (*Erin Fuller, Colleen Forestieri, Carlie Southland*) - 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

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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.

- **SWxSW Corner CISMA (Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area)** (*Abbie Bristol, Alex Florian, Jena Johnson*) - In November, the CISMA team 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).
- **Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP)** (*Kyle Mead*) - FY24 has MAEAP administrators 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.
- **National Association of Conservation Districts (NRCS) Technical Assistance** (*Lucas Hartman*) - 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.
- **Natural Resource Conservation Service Technical Assistance** (*Gabe Francisco*) -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.
- **Outreach** (*Jacob Diljak*) - 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!
- **Resource Recovery Recycling** (*Kalli Marshall, Jacob Diljak*) - 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.