



Van Buren Conservation District February 2024 Program Update

Submitted by Emily Hickmott, Executive Director

Spring seems to be upon us early this year, which is as disorienting as the date on my calendar! District staff is hard at work planning this year's events and outreach, so keep an eye on our calendar and news posts at www.VanBurenCD.org as we're updating nearly weekly now. Our annual reports have arrived and should be delivered to you soon, if they haven't been already. Please share these with your community members and clients! Recycling collections kick off **April 22** and details have been posted at <https://vanburencd.org/van-buren-county-recycling-collections/>.

Our annual Tree Seedling Sale is open for one more month; 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

If you missed it, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources posted their recent Recreation Grant webinar. Applications are due **April 1**, so you still have some time if your community has a project in mind. [2024 DNR Recreation Grant Application Workshop \(youtube.com\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2024DNRRecreationGrantApplicationWorkshop) If you have any questions, please reach out to the appropriate grants management staff: [Recreation Grant Coordinator – Regional Map \(michigan.gov\)](mailto:RecreationGrantCoordinator@Michigan.gov)

As always, 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. Have a great final month of official winter!

Program Updates:

- **Ag Conservation/Water Quality Projects** (*Erin Fuller, Colleen Forestieri, Carlie Southland*) – 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.
- **SWxSW Corner CISMA (Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area) Team** (*Abbie Bristol, Alex Florian, Jena Johnson*) – 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!
- **Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP)** (*Kyle Mead*) – 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.
- **National Association of Conservation Districts (NRCS) Technical Assistance** (*Lucas Hartman, Gabriel Francisco*) – 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



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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!

- **Outreach** (*Jacob Diljak*) - 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.
- **Resource Recovery & Recycling** (*Kalli Marshall, Jacob Diljak*) - 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.