



Van Buren Conservation District

November 2023 Program Update

Submitted by Emily Hickmott, Executive Director

Our Team has been hard at work in October and November submitting grant applications and filing grant reports! In eight weeks, we submitted seven grant applications to bring funds into Van Buren County to address scrap tire disposal, best grazing practices, upstream water quality, invasive species treatment and education, and on-the-field nutrient management. We're excited to hear back from the grantors in the next several months on these grants.

In the meantime, staff is continuing their usual work and planning the CISMA Annual Meeting, Backyard Symposium virtual speaker series, and the Farming for the Future conference. Additionally, our annual spring Tree Seedling Sale will be live on our website as of January 1, 2024 - more details to come on that. 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 December!

Program Updates:

- **Ag Conservation/Water Quality Projects** (*Erin Fuller, Colleen Forestieri, Carlie Southland*) - In September, Van Buren Conservation District staff completed a three-year grant project with Xylem Inc. and the University of Notre Dame. The project explored innovative approaches to managing farm runoff from tile lines. The team installed sensors in water control structures at the edge of a farm field to track nutrient loss and soil moisture levels. The research provides support for a real-time control system that will enable farmers to monitor and control their tile runoff which would ultimately reduce nutrient loss and provide optimal soil moisture for crops. This project was funded by the Great Lakes Protection Fund.
- **SWxSW Corner CISMA (Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area)** (*Abbie Bristol, Alex Florian, Jena Johnson*) - This month, the CISMA team wrote applications for three grants, one to the Forest Service's Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) Cooperative Weed Management Area grant program, and two to the Michigan Invasive Species Grant Program (MISGP). Management of Phragmites and Japanese knotweed along Van Buren County rights-of-way concluded for 2023. Spotted lanternfly traps were checked and removed from survey locations. No spotted lanternfly were detected in our service area.
- **Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP)** (*Kyle Mead*) - The specialist started reaching out to farmers that were due for Re-verification towards the end of last fiscal year, which allowed him to start with Re-Assessments at the start of FY24. The specialist has some of those farms already scheduled for Re-Verification in November along with some new Verifications. The state is setting a base goal of 12 New MAEAP Verifications for each technician. This would get MAEAP to its statewide goal of 500 new Verifications for the FY.
- **National Association of Conservation Districts (NRCS) Technical Assistance** (*Lucas Hartman*) - New application processing protocol for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) will allow conservation district staff to drastically reduce wait time for Farm Bill conservation program applicants. The EQIP application deadline was November 17.
- **Natural Resource Conservation Service Technical Assistance** (*Gabe Francisco*) - The technician and the MAEAP specialist worked together to verify Tending Tilth LLC, a prescribed grazing business. Tending Tilth is now one of the very first contracted grazing businesses in the state to be

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environmentally verified through the MAEAP program. This partnership with Tending Tilth started at our yearly grazing day at Windshadow farm this past summer. Since then, Lauren and her Tending Tilth interns have become a common face at many of our field days and community events. One of the most important sites that we were able to get MAEAP verification for Tending Tilth was at the Mill at Vicksburg. This former paper mill located along Portage Creek is a designated brownfield site by the state of Michigan. Through amazingly hard work and dedication by everyone involved, it has risen and grown past that damaging moniker and is now a model of sustainability and environmental success.

- **Outreach** (*Jacob Diljak*) - Publications and projects are underway for public outreach: the annual report; calendar; Food, Farm, & Fun Guide; Tree Sale; and Backyard Symposium. Stay tuned for more updates on these fun, impactful projects!
- **Resource Recovery Recycling** (*Kalli Marshall, Jacob Diljak*) - We wrapped the recycling event season in October with the Lawrence Recycle Roundup on Saturday October 14. It was a cold and rainy day, but we served 185 households to collect household hazardous waste, tires, electronics, paper for shredding, and foam. Kalli ended the month with a presentation to the South Haven Rotary Club titled "Beyond the Bin".