



Van Buren Conservation District

December 2021 Program Update

Submitted by Emily Hickmott, Deputy Administrator

As 2021 comes to a close, the VBCD team aims to once again provide regular updates to other key Van Buren County parties and partners about all that is happening at the District. The VBCD Staff is transitioning to the time of year when we have more time for office work, even if we're still largely working from home. If you have or hear of environmental concerns that we might be able to assist with, please take advantage of our updated contact information that can be found here: <https://vanburencd.org/about/meet-our-staff/>.

We want to also share that we learned there are funds through EGLE for municipalities for low interest loans regarding: wastewater treatment plant upgrades, combined and/or sanitary sewer overflow abatements, collection system installation or improvements, stormwater treatment, and non-point source pollution reduction projects. More details here: <https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/MIDEQ/bulletins/2fdd24d>

Program Updates:

- **Ag Conservation/Water Quality Projects** (*Erin Fuller, Colleen Forestieri, Hannah Hudson*) – Staff worked with area farmers to install cover crops after corn and soybeans harvest. This conservation practice helps reduce nutrient and sediment runoff into nearby lakes and streams and improves soil health for the farmers. Nearly 1,000 acres of post-harvest cover crops have been installed, in addition to 3,000 acres of pre-harvest, aerially-applied cover crops that were planted earlier in the season.
- **SWxSW Corner CISMA (Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area)** (*Abbie Bristol, Alex Florian, Andrew Michalek*) – The Strike Team season wrapped up, concluding foliar treatment until 2022. Lessons learned throughout the 2021 season have been recorded and reflected upon to better the program for 2022. The CISMA also met with Cass and Berrien Conservation Districts to begin planning future Japanese knotweed surveys and/or management in those counties.
- **MAEAP** (*Kyle Mead*) – The technician has been reaching out to farmers that are due for MAEAP Re-Verification as well as following up with farmers that are new to MAEAP. One grower is close to Verification after 15 years of effort. Several Verifications were scheduled on new and repeat farms.
- **National Association of Conservation Districts Technical Assistance** (*Lucas Hartman*) – Various deadlines for NRCS programs in 2022 have been set. Applications for funding through the EQIP program are due January 14th.
- **Outreach** (*Jacob Diljak*) – Several large projects are concluding or are making significant progress: the first ever 2022 VBCD calendar; 2021 annual report; 2022 tree sale materials; 2022 Backyard Symposium; and revamped 2022 Food, Farm, and Fun Guide. These projects will benefit the County, residents, and VBCD alike by showcasing our agritourism, public green spaces, conservation programs and resources, transparent governance, and more.
- **Produce Safety** (*Patrick Gordon*) – Farm visits were completed in Calhoun County.
- **Resource Recovery Recycling** (*Emily Hickmott*) – Multiple grants will become available for application in 2022; preparations were made. The State will likely continue to prioritize regional partnerships and applications. On November 17, 2021, the Southwest Michigan Solid Waste Consortium voted by the 2/3 of member counties required to support a Calhoun County resolution to dissolve the consortium. The Van Buren Conservation District plans to gather former SWMSWC scrap tire grant partners to apply as a region in the future.