



Van Buren Conservation District

January 2026 Program Update

Submitted by *Emilly Hickmott, Executive Director*

Happy New Year! The Van Buren Conservation District (VBCD) Board & Staff hope you had a great end of the year and that 2026 is off to a great start already. We look forward to working with you to provide conservation assistance and services in Van Buren County this year. Reach out anytime - staff-specific contact information is available at VanBurenCD.org/about. Our full board reports can be found on our website as well.

Did you know? Each spring, most Michigan conservation districts (including the VBCD) conduct a conservation plant sale to offer a variety of high-quality, native seedlings, plugs, flowers and grasses, for erosion control, wildlife habitat, reforestation, windbreaks, and many other conservation purposes. Varieties generally include shrubs, deciduous and coniferous trees, and sometimes aquatic plants, grasses, ground covers, and wildflowers.

The VBCD's annual **Tree Seedling Sale** begins accepting pre-orders on January 1, and this year, we're accepting them through March 29. After that, all pre-orders should be picked up during our leftover sale and pickup days: April 10 and April 11.

Pre-orders are a great way to make sure you have access to all of the species we're selling that you might want to improve your land with. If you're not sure where to start, you can check out the chart on each species' webpage or contact us for more information. Help us build wildlife habitat and beautify your space in 2026 by considering native and adapted species.

<https://vanburenCD.org/shop/>

Upcoming Events (Details available on [our website](#)):

- Office Closed for the Birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. | January 19
- Staff Training | The Stewardship Network Conference | January 22-23
- VBCD Board Meeting | January 28 at 10:00 AM | 1035 E Michigan Ave., Paw Paw
- Discover with the District: Winter Wildlife | February 2 at 5:00 PM | Van Buren District Library Bloomingdale Branch | 109 E Kalamazoo St., Bloomingdale | registration preferred
- SWxSW Corner Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area (CISMA) Annual Meeting | February 11 at 10:00 AM | Van Buren ISD Conference Center | 490 S Paw Paw St., Lawrence
- Birds and Blooms Family Event | February 14 at 10:00 AM | Wolf Lake State Fish Hatchery | 34270 CR 652, Mattawan
- Office Closed for Washington's Birthday | February 16
- Staff Training | Michigan Invasive Species Conference (MISC) Annual Meeting | February 18-19



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Program Updates:

- **Ag Conservation/Water Quality Projects** (*Erin Fuller and Colleen Forestieri*) - The Ag and Water Quality team focused on planning outreach and education events for 2026. This includes finding speakers as well as sponsors and grants to support these events. We look forward to hosting a conference for local farmers as well as field days and small grower meetings in the coming year. The team also worked with farmers on completing contracts for cost-share for post-harvest cover crops.
- **SWxSW Corner CISMA (Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area) Team** (*Abbie Bristol, Alex Florian, Jena Johnson*) - The CISMA Team was able to take a breath and focus more on the tasks we set aside in October while grant-writing. As we finish up reporting on our last year of work, we're looking ahead to make 2026 a year that is fully funded with diverse opportunities. Everything from large federal grants to state grants to new and recurring partner contracts, the CISMA Team is hard at work making 2026 a successful year.
- **Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP) and Regen Ag Program** (*Kyle Mead*) - The specialist worked to visit farmers between snowstorms to be able to see and access what happens at farms. He also scheduled with the Michigan Department of Agriculture & Rural Development's (MDARD) MAEAP Verifier for two full days of program verification on farms in January.
- **MDARD Forestry Assistance Program (FAP):** (*Benjamin Savoie, CF of Barry Conservation District*) - Ben will begin covering Van Buren County as part of the program's expansion from three counties to nine. We look forward to working with Ben to organize site visits and enroll interested landowners in the State's Qualified Forest Program. If you have any questions, contact Ben at (269) 908-4134 ben.savoie@macd.org
- **National Association of Conservation Districts (NRCS) Technical Assistance** (*Lucas Hartman, Gabriel Francisco*) - The technicians conducted farm visits and site evaluations to support existing CSP and EQIP participants, as well as assisted prospective 2025–2026 EQIP applicants with preparing required documentation in anticipation of application availability.
- **Outreach** (*Jacob Diljak*) - While conservation may look "sleepy" right now, we're building a year of public engagement, events, support, and sharing local stories. You'll want to stay tuned for programs, material (like our annual report and local guide), and the many ways we get involved in our community.
- **Resource Recovery & Recycling** (*Kalli Marshall, Jacob Diljak*) - Kalli has nearly finished reporting for the EGLE Infrastructure grant that improved many transfer stations. Work included further forward movement on Materials Management Planning, data collection and showcasing, and prepping/ planning for collections and events in the 2026 season.

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