



Van Buren Conservation District May 2022 Program Update

Submitted by Emily Hickmott, Deputy Administrator

The Van Buren Conservation District's (VBCD) busy season has geared up, kicking off with a successful tree sale, various Earth Day presentations from staff members, and three days of recycling events. We have hired our seasonal CISMA Strike Team members, a new Recycling & Materials Management Coordinator, and a Seasonal Conservation Associate to increase our invasive species treatment, resource recovery programming, and education this summer. The Administrator and Deputy Administrator have been working to effectively onboard the new staff and continue training staff that has been hired within the last year. We are excited about our growth and looking forward to an impactful summer.

Program Updates:

- **Administrator** (*Kim Sinclair*) - With the Tree Sale, we kick off the educational programming season with Earth Day. We participated in 6 different Earth Day Events. We also continued our long standing spring macro invertebrate collection with TRC (Two Rivers Coalition). Four new staffers started between April and May. We did our first ever prescribed burn on our Butterfield Drain property. Distributed several hundred annual reports to stakeholders, partners and citizens. Started distributing our 2022 Food Farm and Fun Guide. We are gearing up for our summer education which will all take place at Wolf Lake State Fish Hatchery. The Administrator & Deputy Administrator attended the MACD Capital Day where we were able to lobby for MACD Operational Funding for FY 2023 as well as thank the legislature for their support.
- **Ag Conservation/Water Quality Projects** (*Erin Fuller, Colleen Forestieri, Hannah Hudson*) - In April, Van Buren Conservation District staff hosted two virtual focus groups for a variety of stakeholders across the Great Lakes region (including academics, conservation groups, drainage engineers, regulators, and utilities) on the topic of drainage water management on farm fields. New technology is emerging to support managing drainage in real-time which could benefit farmers and lead to improved water quality. These focus groups were designed to promote discussion and receive feedback from professionals in the field. Funding for this project is provided by the Great Lakes Protection Fund, and project partners include the University of Notre Dame and Xylem, Inc.
- **SWxSW Corner CISMA (Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area)** (*Abbie Bristol, Alex Florian, Justin Palthe, Lance McCarty*) - As the weather warms, the CISMA is once again doing site visits. Permission for almost all of the Spotted Lanternfly trap sites has been obtained. The CISMA also aided in the VBCD's prescribed burn for invasive species control.
- **MAEAP** (*Kyle Mead*) - With the co-ordination of the Butterfield Drain prescribed burn, district tree sale, and the technician finishing up a college class, April did not see as many assessments as some months, but the technician did facilitate four verifications. The technician also coordinated a quarterly virtual meeting open to all the MAEAP Techs in the state. The technician took the initiative to create this meeting in response to receiving similar irrigation questions from different technicians and decided it may be helpful to all get together virtually for an hour or so four times a year to ask questions and brainstorm issues/ideas/etc. The VBCD MAEAP technician has trained local technicians for many years and continues to pass on his 18-years-worth of experience around the state.



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- **National Association of Conservation Districts Technical Assistance** (*Lucas Hartman*) - The technician planned and implemented a prescribed burn at the VBCD property "Butterfield Drain". Over ten years ago, 60 acres of the property were planted to native warm season grasses. This prescribed burn in 2022 was the first management activity since the planting. With a heavy load of dead and dry fuel on the ground, we were able to successfully kill and set back many of the invading weeds and woody species. Additional burns will be scheduled for three of the next five years depending on field conditions.
- **Outreach** (*Jacob Diljak*) - Our annual tree seedling sale sold nearly 12,000 seedlings after days of preparation and three days of pick-ups. Informational invasive Japanese Knotweed 1/3 sheets and door hangers arrived so they will be sent to municipalities and targeted landowners. The 2022 Van Buren County Food, Farm & Fun Guides have arrived and will be distributed to municipalities, businesses, farmers markets, and Michigan Welcome Centers.
- **Resource Recovery Recycling** (*Kalli Marshall*) - 2022 Recycling collections are off to a great start. Two days of large tire collections were held and one day of electronics and passenger tires was also completed. With the help of the Van Buren County Sheriff's Department's work program crew, we were able to proceed with the collections smoothly and collect 55.87 tons of tires!