



## Van Buren Conservation District January 2024 Program Update

*Submitted by Emily Hickmott, Executive Director*

Happy New Year! In 2024, the VBCD celebrates its 80th anniversary, so we have updated our logo and will be celebrating throughout the year with historical photos in our social media, publications, and more! We hope you enjoy looking back with us and will also join us in looking forward to what more we can do together to care for our water, soil, and air in Van Buren County.

Our annual Tree Seedling Sale has started; 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](http://www.VanBurenCD.org/Shop) Additionally, have our Backyard Symposium webinar series coming up during the lunch hour **February 5-8**. More details can be found here: <https://VanBurenCd.org/2024-backyard-symposium/> The SWxSW Corner Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area (CISMA) Annual Meeting will be held on Friday, **February 16** at 1:00 PM at the Pokagon Band Community Center in Dowagiac. Please RSVP by contacting CISMA Coordinator Alex Florian at [invasivesed@vanburencd.org](mailto:invasivesed@vanburencd.org) or calling 269-633-9044. This will be a great opportunity to learn more about invasive species work and specifically Spotted Lanternfly.

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 February!

### **Program Updates:**

- **Ag Conservation/Water Quality Projects** (*Erin Fuller, Colleen Forestieri, Carlie Southland*) - In December, Van Buren Conservation District staff participated in a round table meeting with local Van Buren County farmers. This meeting was hosted by Michigan Agriculture Advancement. The purpose of this meeting was to get a producer perspective on conservation programs and practices and what new efforts might be needed, and to have conversations with farmers to brainstorm new ideas for better policies going forward.
- **SWxSW Corner CISMA (Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area) Team** (*Abbie Bristol, Alex Florian, Jena Johnson*) - This month, the team primarily looked to the future. We spent much of our time planning annual meetings, writing grants, and updating our list of priority species. With greater organization and communication across the CISMA team as a whole, our grip on funding and grant goals has become more tangible and better understood. We are entering 2024 with a readiness and excitement like never before!
- **Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP)** (*Kyle Mead*) - FY24 has MAEAP administrators challenging the techs to get all lapsed farmers contacted for re-verification, to re-verify as many farms as we can to keep our retention percentage up, as well as for every tech to get 12 new verifications. With 12 new and 59 reverifications from 5 years ago, Van Buren's verification goal is 71. With the help of Gabe and Lucas, the new verification goal should go smoothly. To hit the ground running, the specialist completed 8 Verifications (5 new and 3 Re) at the start of November.
- **National Association of Conservation Districts (NRCS) Technical Assistance** (*Lucas Hartman*) - Van Buren Conservation District has been awarded 12 additional months of funding for two conservation technicians to assist NRCS staff with Farm Bill Programs. This award comes from the



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Technical Assistance and Outreach grant administered by the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD).

- **Natural Resource Conservation Service Technical Assistance** (*Gabe Francisco*) - I along with the rest of the Conservation District staff have been hard at work getting things together to start this next year on the right foot. Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) clients are getting paid, and Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)/ ACT NOW clients are rapidly getting signed up. Conservation planning and assistance is on track to be at an all time high this year for Van Buren County! Our submission to the Climate Smart Commodities grant has officially made it to the second application round, with a final due date of March 15.
- **Outreach** (*Jacob Diljak*) - Calendars were delivered to partners and the public. 2024 Food, Farm, & Fun Guide is nearing its first draft. Fundraising and donation opportunities were expanded through website work and Tree Sale updates.
- **Resource Recovery & Recycling** (*Kalli Marshall, Jacob Diljak*) - Resource Recovery slowed down as collection season planning wrapped and the holiday season commenced. December focused on education and planning for the exciting Recycling Infrastructure grants to come that will make improvements to several transfer stations in Van Buren County.