



## Van Buren Conservation District October 2023 Program Update

Submitted by *Emilly Hickmott, Executive Director*

The VBCD has officially wrapped up the last of our events for this calendar year. The October 14 Recycle Roundup event in Lawrence was a great success, and we look forward to sharing our end-of-year collection numbers with you next month. With township help, we submitted a robust grant application for scrap tire collection events and year-round collection opportunities and hope to hear back on this request after the new year. Over 5,000 acres of cover crops were planted in September to help protect our water and increase farmers' yields. Keep an eye out for news on some upcoming MAEAP verifications, as our 19-year specialist has been hard at work with some local landowners.

Our CISMA team found a new aquatic invasive plant in Berrien County and is already undergoing management. Please remember not to flush fish tank contents and be on the lookout for plants you don't recognize. You can read a Hydrilla press release here:

<https://www.michigan.gov/egle/newsroom/mi-environment/2023/10/30/first-michigan-detection-of-invasive-hydrilla-triggers-response> 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.

### Program Updates:

- **Ag Conservation/Water Quality Projects** (*Erin Fuller, Colleen Forestieri, Carlie Southland*) - The Van Buren Conservation District staff worked with 15 farmers to install 5,407 acres of cover crops via airplane in September 2023. These cover crops will help prevent erosion and pollution of our waterways, as well as improve soil health so farmers can see better yields. 2,615 of these acres were cost-shared through grant programs.
- **SWxSW Corner CISMA (Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area)** (*Abbie Bristol, Alex Florian, Jena Johnson*) - This Month SWxSW Corner CISMA Staff detected the first known population of Hydrilla in Michigan. Staff also attended an on-site training in Oakland county to better familiarize ourselves with spotted lanternfly. The Strike team has been hard at work performing treatments for the Van Buren County Road Commission.
- **Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP)** (*Kyle Mead*) - The specialist finished the fiscal year (FY) strong with several assessments, some Verifications and meetings/training. He has already begun meeting with farmers that are due for new assessments and verifications for FY24 with the goal of knocking out as many visits as possible before the weather gets cold.
- **National Association of Conservation Districts (NRCS) Technical Assistance** (*Lucas Hartman*) - Conservation Stewardship program participants have completed all required conservation practice enhancements for 2023. Certification process for these participants is complete.
- **Natural Resource Conservation Service Technical Assistance** (*Gabe Francisco*) - The technician previously applied for a grant through the National Fish and Wildlife Services "Sustain our Great Lakes" grant. Unfortunately, we were not selected for that project, but that hasn't deterred our hopes to run a grazing program from Van Buren County. Forming a partnership with Grand Valley State University and a new MAEAP-verified farm, Tending Tilth LLC, the VBCD is submitting a Letter of Concept to the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) for their Climate Smart Commodities (CSC) Grant. The proposed project is for the implementation of a grazing team within

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Van Buren County and a free Grazing School for area residents to learn skills in conservation-minded livestock management.

- **Outreach** (*Jacob Diljak*) - Two community cleanup events were held in September: one on the Paw Paw River and the other on the Van Buren State Trail in Covert. Registration to advertise in the 2024 Food, Farm, & Fun Guide is now open!
- **Resource Recovery Recycling** (*Kalli Marshall, Jacob Diljak*) - September was a great month. We were offered partial funding for the EGLE Infrastructure grant so work has commenced to finalize budgets and work plans before signing. We also held our last Passenger & Semi and electronic recycling event of 2023 in Porter Township.