



Van Buren Conservation District

October 2025 Program Update

Submitted by Emily Hickmott, Executive Director

The VBCD staff continues to work exclusively from home and the field until our office at the USDA Service Center reopens. We are not available in our office, but we will continue to work and be available to meet. We are grateful to be able to continue working on soil and water conservation in Van Buren County thanks to local funding sources like the Van Buren Conservation District Programs Millage; support from Van Buren County and our local townships, villages, and cities; and other local funding sources. Contact information is available at VanBurenCD.org/about to find out how our team can best help you.

Since last month's report, we have completed this season's road right-of-way treatment of high priority invasive species – Japanese knotweed and phragmites. We enjoyed being a part of the Van Buren County Road Commission's Employee Appreciation Day where we were able to do some invasive species trivia with their excellent staff! Check out the staff's updates below to see what else we've been up to this fall.

Did you know? Michigan's Conservation Districts are governmental subdivisions of the State of Michigan. We are public organizations created under the provisions of Soil Conservation District Law, Public Act 297 of 1937. We are overseen by the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Our work is administered by a publicly elected board of directors (as defined by the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act Public Act 451 of 1994, as amended). Board Directors serve four year terms that are typically staggered, so we tend to have an election at our annual meeting each year. Curious about what conservation districts are or how we work? Reach out anytime!

Upcoming Events (Details available on our website):

- Veteran's Day Holiday | Tuesday, November 11, 2025
- Van Buren Conservation District Board Meeting | Wednesday, November 19, 2025 | 10:00 AM | VBCD Office / USDA Service Center | 1035 E Michigan Ave., Paw Paw, MI 49079
 - *Meeting relocation will be posted on our website and on the USDA doorfront if the USDA Center is not open on November 19.*
- Thanksgiving Holiday | Thursday, November 27, 2025
- Van Buren Conservation District Board Meeting | Wednesday, December 17, 2025 | 10:00 AM | VBCD Office / USDA Service Center | 1035 E Michigan Ave., Paw Paw, MI 49079
 - *Meeting relocation will be posted on our website and on the USDA doorfront if the USDA Center is not open on November 19.*

Program Updates:

- **Ag Conservation/Water Quality Projects** (*Erin Fuller and Colleen Forestieri*) – In September, the Ag and Water Quality team coordinated our annual aerial fly-on cover crop co-op. Over 2,200 acres of cover crops were planted with this method. Additionally, Erin Fuller led a "Discover with the District" event at the Phillips Family Memorial Nature Sanctuary in Decatur.



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- **SWxSW Corner CISMA (Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area) Team** (*Abbie Bristol, Alex Florian, Jena Johnson*) – The field season is slowly winding down, but the CISMA team is still working diligently to finalize projects, address high priority invasive species, and prepare for the upcoming year. The Strike Team was hard at work spraying and identifying all the Phragmites and Japanese knotweed in Van Buren County Road Rights of Way. Multiple presentations were given to a variety of audiences, including the Van Buren County Road Commission, garden clubs, and coastal communities. The team was available for impromptu surveys of spotted lanternfly (SLF) when reports were suddenly made (no SLF were found, but connections with property owners were made). The team identified the CISMA's needs and began writing grants for competitive projects to fund work in 2026 and beyond.
- **Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP) and Regen Ag Program** (*Kyle Mead*) – The Fiscal year has come to an end, and the tech has been able to meet or exceed all of his goals except for the Reverification Goal and missed by not much. This past year has been great for meeting new landowners and filling the pipeline with more folks who will sooner or later become MAEAP Verified.
- **National Association of Conservation Districts (NRCS) Technical Assistance** (*Lucas Hartman, Gabriel Francisco*) – This month was our annual Grazing Field Day and it was held at Conservation Technician Gabriel Francisco's farm Thunderfoot Farms in Paw Paw Michigan. Attendees heard from Gabe about how his farm has been working this multi-generational farm and some of the interesting grazing practices he has been doing on his small diversified livestock farm. Keynote speaker was Nathan Drumhiller of Drumhiller Farms located in Parma Michigan.
- **Outreach** (*Jacob Diljak*) – September saw two field day events supporting two groups within our communities: coastal residents and farmers. The VBCD's first Dune Day and Grazing Field Day strengthened our community support and shared stewardship of our natural resources. We also unveiled our new trail signage along the Van Buren State Trail!
- **Resource Recovery & Recycling** (*Kalli Marshall, Jacob Diljak*) – September was a busy month as we engaged with Municipal Leaders at Lunch and Learns, held our last Passenger & Semi Tire and Electronics Collection of the year and prepped for the end of the fiscal year. We were able to upgrade our pesticide container with a new sign and paint. We are wrapping up the 2023 Recycling Infrastructure Grant and share the exciting end results.