

Eaton Conservation District 2012 Annual Report

The mission of the Eaton Conservation District is to promote and encourage cooperation with other individuals, groups, organizations, or agencies in an organized effort to conserve and improve the natural resources in Eaton County.

Eaton Conservation District

551 Courthouse Dr,
Charlotte, MI 48813

Phone:
517-543-5848 x 5
www.eatoncounty.org

2012 Board of Directors

Bill Bradford
Tom Raymond
Jim Droscha
Dave Brown

ECD Staff

Andrea Stay
Jennifer Silveri
Rachael Loucks
Jennifer Hunnell

NRCS Staff

Tim Redder
Ruben Torres

Introduction

The Eaton Conservation District was created as an entity of state government to develop and carry out programs to reduce erosion, protect water quality and encourage wise land management. In recent years land use patterns have changed dramatically. Pressures on natural resources have continued to mount with erosion problems due to development without proper conservation measures in place as well as other non-point source pollution occurring due to the actions of the many new land users in rural and suburban areas. Priority issues today include land use, urban sprawl, water quality, loss of wetlands, forestry and wildlife management, and nutrient management.

The Eaton Conservation District (ECD) is a legal entity of State Government organized under provisions of Act 297, P.A. 1937, as amended. ECD is a locally controlled resource management agency, created by concerned landowners and administered by publicly elected boards of directors.

The locally elected five-member board of directors makes all planning decisions regarding the District's programs and activities. The directors hire qualified staff to conduct and carry out the programs and activities. These programs provide technical help, information and awareness to assist people in the District to properly manage their natural resources. There are 78 Conservation Districts that are generally organized along county boundaries.

The Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (MDARD) are responsible for assisting and coordinating the activities of local districts. The Environmental Stewardship Division of MDARD also has administrative responsibilities to ensure each district is operated and maintained as a governmental entity.

District funding sources include state appropriations, county and other governmental appropriations, federal and state grants, and other locally initiated and conducted fund raising activities. Conservation District directors are responsible for developing funding sources for the operation of the Conservation District and for the conduct of programs focused on solving resource issues.

Conservation Districts partner with many local and statewide groups and organizations. The two main agencies that assist with Conservation Districts are the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. There are also three main non-profit organizations that support Districts: The Michigan Association of Conservation Districts, the Michigan Association of Conservation District Employees and the National Association of Conservation Districts. ECD partners with many regional organizations as well: Resource Conservation and Development, Michigan State University Extension, Eaton County Parks, Pheasants Forever, Quality Deer Management Association, US Fish and Wildlife Service, County Schools and Tri-County Regional Planning.

Financial Report

INCOME	Oct 2011-Sep 2012
Federal Grants	5,000.00
Contributions from Local Units	31,750.90
State Grants	273,466.12
Charges for Services	6,034.00
Interest and Rentals	2,588.31
Tree Sale	34,111.00
TOTAL	352,950.83
EXPENSES	
Carry Forward	26,238.95
281 District Operation	88,709.59
282 Groundwater Expense Control	53,501.37
289 Arbor Day	53,627.03
291 319 Expense Control	79,717.68
292 Butternut Creek Restoration	7,598.03
294 Tree & Resale Exp	18,572.69
299 Groundwater website	2,4375.00
Total	325,950.83

Land Use

ECD recognizes the importance of land use patterns on protecting natural resources. ECD is dedicated to serving as a resource for local planning officials. The Greening Mid Michigan Project is a local effort to develop and implement a vision for green space and conservation efforts. This effort is a part of the larger Mid Michigan Program for Greater Sustainability funded by a three million dollar U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Sustainable Communities grant. ECD has worked with local planning groups to develop a green

infrastructure vision for the community. This is a great way for local municipalities and townships to work together and plan for future green space, trail linkages, and funding opportunities.

ECD staff serve on the Eaton County Farmland Preservation Board and review and approve PA 116 applications for farmland agreement. In 2012, the board of directors reviewed and approved 6 applications for PA 116 for over 400 acres. We are currently partnering on the Healthy Waters Rural Pride Committee to seek additional opportunities for farmland preservation at a regional level. Staff are involved with the local Eaton County Good Food effort. The Middle Grand River Watershed Planning Project is working closely with local townships, cities, and villages in developing the management plan. This plan, once approved, will provide these communities with the opportunity to leverage additional grant funds for water quality projects.

ECD is co-located with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. As part of this partnership, ECD staff provide outreach and technical assistance to landowners to encourage conservation practices and participation with Farm Bill conservation programs.

Water Quality & Quantity

The Eaton Conservation District is dedicated to protecting water quality and Quantity in Eaton County. Multiple programs focus on identifying and reducing risks to protect our waterways.

The Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP) is an innovative, proactive program that helps farms of all sizes and all commodities voluntarily prevent or minimize agricultural pollution risks. In 2012, District staff worked with 20 land owners to complete environmental risk assessments and discuss best management practices, and develop emergency plans on farms. In 2012 there were 25 MAEAP verifications/reverifications and 550 risk reductions to reduce point and nonpoint source pollution. Staff completed 14 pesticide drift management plans, 7 manure management plans, 18 farm emergency plans, and mapped 6,969 acres of crop and pastureland to highlight sensitive areas and monitor erosion from soil loss.



Of the 16 wells that staff monitored for nitrates and bacteria, two came back as positive for coliform. Staff addressed and successfully resolved the concerns with the landowner.

ECD is halfway through a 2 year watershed planning grant for the Middle Grand River. This watershed encompasses approximately 258 square miles (~165,000 acres) in Clinton, Ingham, Eaton, and Ionia counties. Throughout 2012, ECD has been collecting water quality and land use data and stakeholder feedback. To date, ECD staff have sampled 21 sites (for 4 weeks) for E.coli (bacterium used as an indicator of the presence of waste from humans and other warm blooded animals), 26 sites for macroinvertebrates, 265 sites for agriculture practices and mailed surveys to stakeholders regarding opinions and attitudes.



To better understand the sources of E.coli in the watershed, ECD incorporated bacterial source tracking and canine scent tracking. During this effort 10 sites were sampled for bacterial source tracking (bovine or equine sources) and 12 sites were sampled via canine scent tracking (for human sources).

A large portion of the watershed planning process involves working with stakeholders to determine issues of concern and general knowledge of the watershed. Whether positive or negative people have a huge impact on our watershed, gaining their feedback is crucial to our success. ECD used online and mail surveys to gain this knowledge. Urban, suburban and agricultural residents living in the watershed participated in the survey. The watershed plan will use stakeholder feedback as a tool to guide water quality recommendations and outreach and education plans.

Through a grant with the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, ECD oversees promotion and updating/editing for

Fall Tour Success

The Annual fall tour September 6th 2012, had 30 attendees, and collected 6588 lbs of unwanted pesticides. This year's tour was a cooperation between Eaton, Barry, Ingham and Ionia Conservation Districts, MSU Extension, USDA NRCS, and Crop Production Services in Woodbury. Participants attended a MAEAP Phase one Meeting and learned emergency spill response techniques. CPS professionals provided crop updates and demonstrations to prepare for to agrichemical spills.

a statewide water quality website www.miwaterstewardship.org. The website includes games, lesson plans, tools for homeowners, conservation courses, and more. Promotional efforts in 2012 aimed to make as many residents aware of the website's existence as possible. These efforts seem to have paid off. There has been a visible increase in the number of visitors, especially among first time visitors, to the website so far in 2012. This year 7,804 people visited the site and reviewed 29,215 pages. The Environmental Protection Agency, State Departments, Local municipalities, and teachers, recommend this site to residents and students.

On August 6th, ECD hosted a headwaters tour for the Kickoff of the Thornapple River Expedition. The tour visited several sites throughout the county and showcased 2-stage ditch design, undersized culvert replacement, buffer strips and a 650 Wetland Restoration Project.

ECD serves on planning committees for the Charlotte Wellhead Team, Statewide MAEAP advisory team, Thornapple River Watershed Committee, and Battle Creek Restoration Project.



Wildlife and Habitat

Creating Habitat for wildlife is a core goal of many district and USDA NRCS programs. ECD promotes habitat management through annual tree sales, native plant sales, workshop, information, newsletters, and opportunities. We provide trees and educational trunks to local schools to learn more about natural resources. In March, ECD staff hosted the annual wildlife workshop with speakers from USDA NRCS, MDNR, Pheasants Forever, Quality Deer Management, and Ducks Unlimited. This provides the public with the opportunity to learn about a variety of programs and activities.

Pheasants Forever partners with ECD to rent out a Truax no-till drill for native grass plantings. This drill rents for \$12/ acre and is available by calling the office. The District also rents out tree planters for planting high quantities of seedlings. This year the Great Plains Drill rental program has been discontinued due to the excessive wear and tear on the drill. We encourage landowners to continue to practice no-till planting and provide resources when available.

The Michigan Arbor Day Program is run out of the ECD office from a grant from the DNR. At this year's state Arbor Day Celebration we had 52 classes of 2nd and 3rd graders from 18 schools participate (1,235 students). Through the GO Green Youth Challenge program and sponsorships, we were able to complete 10 community tree plantings totaling 598 trees. As part of this tree planting program, we provide mini-grants to communities. In 2012, local projects approved for funding included Dimondale, Pottersville, Delhi Township, and East Lansing.

The Spring Tree/Shrub Sale and Native Plant sales continue to be a success. This year we added berry bushes to our spring sale and received lots of positive feedback. In total, ECD sold 30,465 trees and shrubs at low-cost to encourage habitat. The Native Plant sale sold 264 perennial plants (such as trillium, black-eyed susans, big blue stem).

ECD continued the partnership with the DNR to enroll landowners in the Hunter Access Program and monitor the contract agreements. This provides hunting access to the public and provides a rental payment to the landowner. Eaton County has 3 sites enrolled (up from 0 in 2010) for a total of 201 acres.

ECD is working with the ALIVE community wellness center in Charlotte on their preserve project. This year we worked with a local contractor to plant native grasses and wildflowers on the site. This includes an upland area that will have walking trails and retention area that has been planted with raingarden species. In the future we will work with ALIVE on a community planting and outreach.

Newsletters, events, and workshops are a great opportunity to educate the public about wildlife habitat and invasive species. In 2012, ECD sent 3 paper newsletters, 13 e-newsletters, and published over 38 news releases. We partnered to help organize the Charlotte River Conservation Day and Thornapple River Clean-ups and with volunteer help picked up trash, planted trees, and pulled invasive species.



Maple Valley Conservation Area Improvements

ECD is managing a 35 acre parcel of property for the Department of Natural Resources in Vermontville.

This year, ECD worked with students from the Maple Valley Jr/Sr High School to build and install a carry down canoe launch and parking area at the site. This will allow access to fishing from the bank and provide an access point for kayaks and canoes. This project was funded through a grant from the Hagen Family Foundation.



Organization Sustainability

In order to be a sustainable organization, ECD has identified the following strategies: 1) Recruit and train board members, 2) Provide continuing education for staff, 3) Increase and diversify funding sources, 4) Provide opportunities for volunteer involvement, and 5) Engage stakeholders.

These 5 core strategies are crucial to the strength of our organization. In 2012, staff and board members attended trainings on board diversity and development, grant writing, program evaluation, pasture management, food safety, erosion and sedimentation, geographic information systems (GIS), and more. Board and staff continue to seek additional and diverse funding mechanisms including tree and material sales, foundation and local funding support, State and Federal Grants, and partnerships with businesses.

ECD has been very successful in utilizing volunteers for events and continuous internships. In 2012, Olivet College provided 4 interns to work on special projects. In total, volunteers accrued over 1350 hours helping out on district programs such as office work, tree wrapping, water quality data collection, and more. These hours are valued at \$28,836. Volunteers help with filing, tree sale fundraiser, riparian plantings, invasive pulling, display events, water quality monitoring, and more!

Reaching stakeholders through a variety of events and outreach is important to the Conservation District. In 2012 ECD expanded our use and network on facebook, twitter, and e-newsletters. Our e-newsletter subscribers increased from 403 to 520 people in 2012. Electronic surveys are used to gather feedback and tailor programs and resources. Our paper newsletter outreach has increased from 2,700 area homes to 3,500. Staff attend meetings and set-up display events for community, farming, and natural resource concerns. Partnerships with stakeholder groups such as Eaton County Farm Bureau, Stewardship Network, Middle Grand River Organization of Watersheds, Habitat Groups, recreation groups, and many more are crucial.

Recognition

This year our staff and programs were recipients of multiple statewide awards and recognition.

Jennifer Silveri, MAEAP Water Stewardship Technician received the statewide MAEAP award for the most on-farm risk reductions completed. She was also nominated for MACDE Technician of the Year and our local Farm Bureau chapter nominated her for Ecology Champion of the Year.

Executive Director Andrea Stay received the Administrator of the Year Award for excellence in overseeing and expanding conservation district programming.

ECD was also named MAEAP Grant Host of the Year for providing leadership and support to the local MAEAP program.

NRCS Accomplishments

Tim Redder, District Conservationist

Fiscal Year 2012 was another productive year for the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Eaton County. NRCS has been working with many landowners implementing contracts and completing practices throughout the year. We have worked with a diverse group of landowners to address resource concerns on different land uses such as: pasture, cropland, grassland, forestland and farm headquarters. Below is a list of the practices that were completed by landowners in Eaton County through NRCS programs in FY 2012:

Grazing Practices:

- Grazing Plans written (2 no.)
- Watering Facilities for livestock (12 no.)
- Pipeline for livestock watering (2,749 feet)
- Fence (10,030 feet)
- Access control to streams & wetlands (8 acres)
- Forage Management (62 acres)
- Rotational Grazing (352.1 acres)
- Windbreak planting (460 feet)
- Well for livestock (1 no.)

Cropland Practices:

- Residue Management, no-till & minimum till (680 acres)
- Conservation Crop Rotation (55 acres)
- Nutrient Management (186 acres)
- Pest Management (2,971.5 acres)
- Critical Area planting (1.5 acres)

Farm Headquarter Practices:

- Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans Written (3 no.)
- Manure Storage (1 no.)
- Agrichemical Containment Facility (1 no.)
- Well Decommissioning (1 no.)
- Seasonal High Tunnel (1 no.)

Wildlife Habitat Practices:

- Forest Management Plans written (2 no.)
- Noxious Weed control (33 acres)
- Conservation Cover planting (128.7 acres)
- Tree Planting (11 acres)
- Wetland Enhancement (2.5 acres)
- Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) plans written (6 – covering approx. 240 acres)

NRCS is currently in the process of working with several landowners to restore approximately 650 contiguous acres of wetland through the Wetland Reserve Program (WRP). The first phase of the project began this fall and will be continuing through the next couple of years. This project consists of returning natural features back to an area that has been farmed but was historically forested wetland. There are many tiles and open drains that will be removed to assist with restoration and native plantings will also be installed to re-establish the wetland plant community, once completed this project will help with improving water quality in the Thornapple River Watershed. We would like to thank the many partners involved in making this project happen!

The Eaton Conservation District and the Natural Resources Conservation Service would like to thank all the landowners in Eaton County who have applied conservation practices either on their own or through a program to help protect and sustain our natural resources. For more information on the above conservation practices or conservation programs that are available, please call the office at (517) 543-1539, ext. 3.

