

Eaton Conservation District 2013 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

2013 Board of Directors

Bill Bradford
Tom Raymond
Jim Droscha
Dave Brown
Keith Moss

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 local and regional organizations as well: Resource Conservation and Development, Michigan State University Extension, Eaton County Parks, Pheasants Forever, Quality Deer Management Association,

Center for Regional Food Systems, Great Lakes Bay Sail, Michigan Food and Farming Systems, US Fish and Wildlife Service, County Schools and Tri-County Regional Planning.

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. Over the past year, ECD has partnered with this effort to help create a video promoting greenspace in the Tri-county Region. The video featured ECD staff and the Country Mill of Charlotte discussing the benefits of Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP) verification.

New in June of this year, Governor Snyder Public Acts 42 through 50 into law. These acts amend the Qualified Forest Property Program (QFP) and expand the role of the Michigan Department of Agriculture Rural Development (MDARD) and the Conservation Districts in provision of assistance to private forestland owners, including administration of QFP. ECD has promoted the new opportunities to landowners through events, news releases, and one-on-one assistance. As applications are processed, ECD will need to review the stocking and productivity of the forestlands.

ECD staff serve on the Eaton County Farmland Preservation Board and review and approve PA 116 applications for farmland agreement. In 2013, the board of directors reviewed and approved 7 applications for PA 116 for 485.35 acres. Staff are involved with the local Eaton County Good Food effort and are helping to plan an upcoming event to connect farmers with farm markets and local food businesses across the county.

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.

Fall Tour Success

This year's fall agriculture tour focused on the benefits of using Cover Crops and a visit to the Hop Head Farm Processing plant in Hickory Corners, MI.

The Annual fall tour September 12th, had 30 attendees, and collected 10,895lbs of unwanted pesticides. This event was a cooperation between Eaton, Barry, Ingham and Ionia Conservation Districts, MSU Extension, USDA NRCS, and Crop Production Services in Woodbury.

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 2013, District staff worked with 39 land owners to complete environmental risk assessments and discuss best management practices, and develop emergency plans on farms. In 2013 there were 17 MAEAP verifications/reverifications and 404 risk reductions to reduce point and nonpoint source pollution.

Staff completed 22 pesticide drift management plans (5027 acres) 27 nutrient management plans (5267.25 acres), 15 manure management plans, 19 farm emergency plans, and mapped 6,153 acres of crop and pastureland to highlight sensitive areas and monitor erosion from soil loss. Staff worked with agricultural producers to restrict livestock access to surface water on three farms and install/improve 143.5 acres of filter strips and buffer strips. Of the 29 wells that staff monitored for nitrates and bacteria, zero contamination was found.



ECD partnered with the Eaton and Ingham Farm Bureaus to secure marketing grants to promote participation in MAEAP among Farm Bureau members. This resulted in the creation of a display and multiple brochures, and Ingham County hosted a farmer appreciation breakfast.

ECD is wrapping up 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 2013, ECD has been analyzing water quality and land use data and working with stakeholders to write a Watershed Management Plan. Based on E.coli monitoring, macroinvertebrate sampling, an agricultural practices survey and mailed surveys to stakeholders regarding opinions and attitudes, the completed Watershed Management Plan will identify methods and practices to improve water quality in the region.

This year ECD partnered with several Mid-Michigan watershed groups and agencies to develop a water resources brand, Pollution Isn't Pretty. The campaign will streamline educational efforts to create clear, consistent messages that educate area residents about water quality concerns and what they can do to reduce pollution and protect our region's water resources. To learn more about Pollution Isn't Pretty visit, www.pollutionisntpretty.org.

ECD was awarded the Capital Region Community Foundation Impact Grant to build the capacity of the Middle Grand River Organization of Watersheds (MGROW). This project will assist local watersheds and water quality programs that are struggling to meet the needs of their citizens. Grant funds will provide the experienced, professional staff necessary to address the specific needs identified by each local watershed and water quality programs MGROW serves.

Through a grant with the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, ECD oversees promotion and updating/editing for a statewide water quality website called the Michigan Water Stewardship Program, which can be found at 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. And things have only gotten better. This year 11,870 people visited the site and reviewed 37,958 pages. Since the website's launch in 2011, 24,171 people worldwide have visited, for a grand total of 111,132 pages viewed.

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. Every 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.

On August 24, ECD partnered on a Habitat Field Day with the Quality Deer Management Association and Pheasants Forever. This event took place on the Strader Farm in Olivet. This location provided a great opportunity to view warm season grass plantings, wetlands, and forestry management. ECD presented at the wetland stop on the tour opportunities to restore and protect wetlands and benefits to wildlife.

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. Last 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 MDNR. At this year's state Arbor Day Celebration we had 50 classes of 2nd and 3rd graders from 18 schools participate (1,062 students). Through the Go Green Youth Challenge program and sponsorships, we were able to complete 8 community tree plantings totaling 239 trees. As part of this tree planting program, we provide mini-grants to communities. In 2013, projects approved for funding included Sparta High School, St. Clair Shores, Tawas City, and Branch County. In addition, the Go Green Youth Challenge program incorporated a Creative Writing Contest this year. K-12 students were encouraged to express their opinions of trees and use their imaginations to explain what trees meant to them. First place winners received an award to plant a tree at their school in addition to other prizes. Since it began in 2011, the Go Green Youth Challenge program has planted over 850 trees across Michigan!

The Spring Tree/Shrub Sale and Native Plant sales continue to be a success. In total, ECD sold 33,729 trees and shrubs at low-cost to encourage habitat. The Native Plant sale sold 228 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 2 sites enrolled (up from 0 in 2010) for a total of 201 acres.

Newsletters, events, and workshops are a great opportunity to educate the public about wildlife habitat and invasive species. In 2013, ECD sent 3 paper newsletters, 13 e-newsletters, and published over 29 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.

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 2013, staff and board members attended trainings on fiscal accountability, stormwater function, conservation marketing, soil health, social media, FOIA and open meetings act, program evaluation, pasture management, food safety, erosion and sedimentation, Michigan Earth Science Teachers Association Conference, 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 2013, Olivet College provided 2 interns to work on special projects. 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. ECD continues to utilize the internet to inform the public and promote programs through our website, facebook, twitter, and e-newsletters. ECD recently gave our website a make-over at www.eatoncd.org. Our e-newsletter subscribers increased from 520 to 725 people in 2013. Electronic surveys are used to gather feedback and tailor programs and resources. Staff attend meetings and set-up display events for community, farming, and natural resource topics.

NRCS Accomplishments

Tim Redder, District Conservationist

In Fiscal Year 2013 there was a large variety of conservation practices implemented with assistance from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Eaton County. NRCS has 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 with assistance from NRCS in FY 2013:

Grazing Practices:

- Grazing Plans written (2 no.)
- Watering Facilities for livestock (6 no.)
- Pipeline for livestock watering (6,800 feet)
- Fence (1,240 feet)
- Pasture Planting (5 acres)
- Rotational Grazing (141 acres)

Cropland Practices:

- Residue Management, no-till & minimum till (680 acres)
- Conservation Crop Rotation (208 acres)
- Nutrient Management (990 acres)
- Pest Management (2,603 acres)
- Cover Crop (25 acres)
- Microirrigation Installation (1 no.)
- Filter Strip (1.5 ac.)

Farm Headquarter Practices:

- Agricultural Energy Management Plans written (1 no.)
- Composting Facility (1 no.)
- Manure Storage Facility (1 no.)
- Roofs & Covers (1 no.)
- Agrichemical Containment Facility (1 no.)
- Seasonal High Tunnel (Hoop House) (2 no.)

- Roof Runoff Management (gutters) (7 no.)
- Heavy Use Protection (1.1 ac.)
- Diversion (200 feet)

Wildlife Habitat Practices:

- Noxious Weed control (40 acres)
- Tree Planting (130 acres)
- Wetland Restoration (368 acres)
-

Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) plans written (9 – covering approx. 140 acres)

We are currently in the process of accepting applications for FY2014 funding for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Conservation Stewardship Program (CStP). There is a very short sign up period this year so do not wait if you are interested. Stop down or give the office a call if you have questions or want to find out more.

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.