



2016 Annual Report

Note from the Director

2016 was a great year for Oceana Conservation District. Our educational programs have been well-received, invasive species management efforts are paying off, and we have developed a strategic plan to help us effectively promote and implement conservation, stewardship and sustainable use of the natural resources in Oceana County over the next five years.

We plan to build on our successes and will continue to expand our services in 2017. We are particularly excited about publishing a Birding Guide to Oceana County and offering wildflower and grass plantings with our new drill.

I would like to take an opportunity to acknowledge Chip Francke, retired naturalist of Ottawa County Parks. Chip has volunteered weeks of his time helping us compile historical data, conduct bird surveys, and help write and

design our Birding Guide to Oceana County. He also provided much appreciated input during our Nature Center Feasibility and Strategic Planning meetings.

I would also like to thank the Oceana Community Foundation. They have been able to help us purchase educational supplies and equipment over the last two years and have been supportive of our efforts to expand educational opportunities. A special thanks to Joan Lound, who has graciously offered her time to review a grant proposal we are drafting to develop a first-rate outdoor education program in Oceana County.

As always, thank you for your support and commitment to protecting the land, rivers, lakes and forests of Oceana County.

Suzie Knoll



The mission of the Oceana Conservation District is to promote conservation, stewardship and sustainable use of the natural resources in Oceana County through landowner assistance and education.

Staff



Suzie Knoll, Executive Director

Suzie joined the District in May of 2014. She comes with degrees in biology and psychology and has experience doing fieldwork relating to avian research and ecological restoration. Her office management, organizational skills and drive to succeed give her the opportunity to lead the District in fulfilling its mission and expanding programs and services of the District.



Lynda Herremans, MAEAP Technician

After receiving a B.S. in Wildlife Biology from MSU, she has worked as a Wildlife, Conservation and Energy Technician, Soil Conservationist, Executive Director at Mason-Lake Conservation District, and now as Oceana's MAEAP Technician since 2011. Lynda loves being able to combine her passion for agriculture and conservation of natural resources as a MAEAP Technician. Lynda was recently recognized for 30 years of service working with Conservation Districts!



Adam Chandler, Conservation Technician

With a degree in Natural Resource Management from Grand Valley State University and a GIS certification, he has been with the District since January of 2016. Adam and his wife recently moved to Oceana County from the Grand Rapids area. He works primarily with the Natural Resource Conservation Service staff in our office to provide assistance to landowners to address their natural resource concerns.



Michael Paling, District Forester

Michael joined our team in June. He recently graduated with a BS in Forestry from Michigan Technological University. Originally from Carsonville, MI, he was involved in Boy Scouts since 2001, earning Eagle Scout in 2011. Michael provides education, outreach, and one-on-one technical assistance to forest owners in Oceana, Muskegon and Newaygo Counties.



Mark Kelly, USDA-NRCS District Conservationist

Mark has been the District Conservationist with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Oceana County since 1991. He graduated from the University of Illinois with an agronomy degree (crops and soils) and has been with USDA for over 36 years working in Illinois before transferring to Michigan. He lives in New Era with his wife. His four children are attending or have graduated from Michigan Tech or MSU.



Dayna McCoy, USDA-NRCS Soil Conservationist

Dayna grew up near metro Detroit in Clarkston and moved to west Michigan to attend GVSU. While earning a degree in Natural Resource Management, she fell in love with the diverse environment of west Michigan. Since graduating in 2011, she has been working with the NRCS in Shelby to help people address natural resource concerns on their property and to utilize Farm Bill programs to do so.



Participants learned about the flora and fauna along the Pentwater River on a guided canoe trip in August

2016 Accomplishments at a Glance

MAEAP verifications	14
Forest landowners assisted	74
Acres enrolled into Qualified Forest Program	3,342
Farms received USDA funding for conservation practices	18
Acres of invasive species treated.....	15.6
Tree/Shrub seedlings sold	29,845
Plugs of beach grass sold	20,000
Acres planted with no-till drill	456
People attended educational field trips and events.....	175
Students attended 6 th grade field trip	225
Pounds of HHW and pesticides collected	39,500
Pounds of pesticide jugs recycled.....	2,600
Wells tested for nitrates	67

MAEAP Report

MAEAP's comprehensive, voluntary, proactive program is designed to reduce farmers' legal and environmental risks through a three-phase process: 1) education; 2) farm-specific risk assessment and practice implementation; and 3) on-farm verification that ensures the farmer has implemented environmentally sound practices. Eight farmers successfully completed all phases during the past year adding 12 new verifications. Four Star Farms was the first farm to receive the new system verification- Forest, Wetlands & Habitat. This brings Oceana County's total verification number to 121. Congratulations to the following farms reaching one or more new verifications during the past year:



B&W Orchards, LLC- Benona
B&W Orchards, LLC- Elbridge
First Fruits Farm, LLC
Four Star Farms

Greiner's Rainbow Acres
Robert Bush Farms
Sponhauer Farms
Whispering Creek Farms

Many more farms were assisted with practices such as Emergency Farm Plans, water use reports, Water Withdrawal Assessment Tool, no-till drill use, spill kits, and more by the MAEAP Technician. Since the first phase of the program is education, much effort goes into providing these opportunities to growers. The following outreach activities took place in 2016.

- MAEAP news articles in Oceana County Farm Bureau (OCFB) And Oceana Conservation District (OCD) newsletters (4)
- MAEAP Phase 1 Meeting in Scottville for Mason, Lake, Oceana & Manistee growers
- MAEAP presentation and display at Asparagus Day
- Oceana Ag Banquet - Banquet included a MAEAP Display and a MAEAP Award Presentation
- Free Nitrate Water Screening for Oceana County residents (67 wells tested)
- MAEAP Technician coordinated the collection and recycling of 2,600 lbs of pesticide containers
- OCFB and OCD Farm/Forestry Tour took place in August and highlighted Farm Bill & MAEAP practices
- Oceana County Fair - OCD and OCFB displays at the county fair included MAEAP activities
- Oceana County Farm Bureau Annual Meeting - 10 Michigan Farm Bureau Member signs were distributed to MAEAP verified farmers for placement on their MAEAP signs





FORESTRY Report

Michigan's Forestry Assistance Program exists to increase active management on non-industrial private forestland. Conservation district foresters help Michigan citizens better understand, plan, manage, protect and utilize their forest resources.

A survey conducted by Michigan State University concludes that only 20% of the 11 million acres of private forestland is actively managed. The Forestry Assistance Program works to increase the number of acres managed under a sustainable forest management plan.

The Forestry Assistance Program has been active in Oceana, Newaygo, and Muskegon counties for three and a half years. In the past year, 74 landowners received forestry assistance accounting for more than 3,500 acres.

The Qualified Forest Program continues to be the driving force for forest owners pursuing management plans and sustainable timber harvests. In 2016, 13 new landowners enrolled into the program ensuring that over 3,000 acres are being sustainably managed. Landowners who are enrolled into the Qualified Forest Program, and work with a consulting forester to develop a forest management plan for their property, qualify for a 16 mil property tax reduction.

Along with assisting landowners, the Forestry Assistance

Program is also responsible for hosting outreach and educational events within the tri-county area. In the past year, the district forester coordinated six programs relating to forest health, pests and diseases, timber and wildlife habitat management, and tree identification.

Another important role of the Forestry Assistance Program over the last few years has been monitoring the threat of forest pests and diseases. We are working with other professionals in the state to closely monitor the spread of the Hemlock Woolly Adelgid (a small white insect that affects hemlock trees) and Oak Wilt (a disease killing isolated stands of white oaks on properties near the lakeshore). Although not documented in Michigan, we are also on the lookout for the Asian Longhorn Beetle which has affected maple trees in neighboring states. Your local conservation district forester can provide information and resources on the early detection, prevention, and treatment of forest pests and diseases.



Natural Resources Conservation Service

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), an agency in the United States Department of Agriculture, works with private landowners to install or implement conservation practices on their land. We are an agency of resource professionals (foresters, biologists, engineers, planners, etc.) who partner and work directly with and through your local conservation district. All assistance with NRCS is voluntary. You, as the landowner, can start and stop your interaction with NRCS at any time. Our one and only job is to educate and assist landowners with installing conservation practices. NRCS has been working with farmers, ranchers, rural landowners and conservation districts since 1935.



Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

For agricultural producers, this program provides financial and technical assistance to address natural resource concerns relating to soil, water, air, plants, animals, and sometimes even humans on their land.

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)

This program provides financial assistance for farmers and ranchers to assist in maintaining the conservation practices already implemented and to challenge them to try new conservation techniques such as soil testing, scouting for pests, or using nutrient management.

Wetland Reserve Easement (WRE)

Designed to restore wetlands that were drained or manipulated in any way for agricultural production. A wetland restoration project involves many parties and can take many years to complete.



The Oceana County NRCS had a busy year working with landowners to protect our county's numerous natural resources. Last year alone, the Environmental Quality Incentives Program awarded over \$500,000 to local producers to help fix natural resource problems on their properties. To improve habitat for declining populations of pollinators, wildflower mixtures were planted in areas protected from spray drift. To protect groundwater quality, fuel stored in old underground tanks was improved to aboveground dual walled tanks with leak detection. Practices completed last year include:

- 8,940 ft of eroding travel lanes permanently stabilized
- 2,320 ft of windbreak established
- 580 acres of improved nutrient management activities
- 480 acres of improved irrigation water management
- 390 acres received long term forest management plan
- 140 acres of cover crop planted
- 15 acres of pollinator planting
- 9 agrichemical storage buildings
- 7 irrigation upgrades to improve uniformity
- 6 improved fueling facilities
- 5 acres reforestation

Additionally, activity with the Conservation Stewardship Program included enrolling three new farms for a total of 1,520 acres. On all of these acres, the farms will be maintaining their level of conservation for five years, and also adopting a new conservation activity.

As the NRCS staff in Shelby reflect on all the work done protecting our county's natural resources, they are looking forward to helping new producers put more conservation on the ground.

2016 Financial Report

October 1, 2015—September 30, 2016

BEGINNING BALANCE (as reported at year end 2015) \$76,800

BEGINNING BALANCE (adjusted per auditor) \$75,127

REVENUES

State Grants \$186,490

Local Funding & Grants \$16,647

Charge for Services..... \$17,408

Sale of Goods..... \$57,944

Rentals & Interest..... \$4,880

Reimbursement for Grant Admin \$38,679

Other Revenue \$11,303

TOTAL REVENUES..... \$333,351

EXPENDITURES

Payroll Expenses..... \$160,950

Payroll Taxes..... \$16,989

Program Administration \$38,679

Operating Expenses/Overhead..... \$17,050

Plant Materials \$38,439

Items Purchased for Resale \$1,836

Building & Equipment Maintenance \$1,189

Training..... \$5,305

Travel/Mileage \$11,310

Education/Outreach..... \$2,863

Recycling Programs \$1,630

Depreciation \$6,617

TOTAL EXPENDITURES \$302,857

ENDING BALANCE \$105,621

What's in the Works for 2017?



Native Seed & Installation

We are now providing native seed and installation services for pollinator plantings, grassland and prairie plantings. We will procure Great Lakes genotype wildflower and grass seed and use a specialized drill that is designed for planting native seed on larger sites. Contact the office if you are interested in creating of acres of wildlife habitat in this way.



Birding Guide to Oceana County

With the generous help of experienced birder and author Chip Francke, we have compiled historical data, conducted numerous bird surveys, and are creating a Birding Guide to Oceana County. The spiral bound notebook will be available in April and will include a checklist of the birds of Oceana County, seasonal graphs, and the top birding locations in Oceana County.



Invasive Species Management

We will continue scouting for and treating aquatic and terrestrial invasive species in Oceana County with funding from the Michigan Invasive Species Grant Program. *Phragmites*, Japanese knotweed, garlic mustard and black swallowwort are current priorities in our county. Let us know if you can help us by reporting invasive species near you!



Expand our Education Program

We will continue to incorporate more educational events in 2017 that we hope will inspire people young and old to explore, appreciate and conserve our local natural resources. Ideally, we would like to be able to hire an Educational Coordinator in the near future to develop environmental programming in an underserved community.



Outdoor Education Center

We continue to seek funding for a simple, yet state of the art, educational center in Oceana County. We would like to be able to provide trails for recreation, educational programming, opportunities to experience nature up-close, and be able to help connect youth, in particular, to the natural world.

