

2023 Annual Report

Oceana

CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Protecting Forests, Fields and Waterways



OCEANA
CONSERVATION
DISTRICT

Letter from the Leadership

2023 was a year to build capacity and take on more work to protect and restore land and water in Oceana County. With input from the community, we developed a Five-Year Strategic Plan and set two operational goals to ensure that the necessary financial and human resources are in place to focus on the five priorities listed below:

Operational Goals:

1. **Increase Funding:** to support educational programming, stewardship activities, and land preservation.
2. **Retain and Grow Staffing:** to coordinate invasive species management and habitat restoration activities.

Natural Resource Priorities:

1. Enhance water quality
2. Manage invasive species
3. Protect and improve wildlife and habitat
4. Improve forest health and management
5. Protect greenspace and farmland

With the priorities identified in our five-year plan, here is what we will be working on in the coming years. We will continue to deliver quality services and programs to farm and forest landowners to implement practices that enhance water quality. Collaborating with watershed partners in West Michigan, we will also increase our capacity to help reduce nonpoint source pollution, sedimentation and other contaminants and will pursue habitat enhancement and stream restoration projects in the White River, Pentwater, and Stony Creek Watersheds.

Working closely with the Muskegon and Ottawa Conservation Districts, we will direct more grant funds to Oceana County to manage invasive species. We aim to address the Hemlock Woolly Adelgid crisis that is wreaking havoc on our local hemlock trees, and will develop ways to create resilience and stabilization along our lakeshore. We're currently developing a plan to create an Oceana County Coastal Conservation Corridor to reforest areas heavily impacted by hemlock loss and are actively applying for grants to fund the project.

With an unprecedented amount of funds available to landowners through USDA's Natural Resource Conservation Service, we're gearing up to create hundreds of acres of critical wildlife habitat for pollinators and birds, increasing biodiversity on farms and fields in Oceana County.

And lastly, with a Land Preservation Fund established, we are setting ourselves up to preserve more land, ideally adjacent to one of our existing preserves or on the White or Pentwater Rivers.

Amidst all of this work, what we really love to do is offer programs that foster an appreciation for what Oceana County has to offer and connect people of all ages to the natural world. I'm thrilled to be a part of this work, creating lasting impact so that future generations can enjoy healthy forests, clean water and abundant wildlife. Thanks to our numerous partners and countless friends and supporters, I'm looking forward to using the momentum we've created to embark on new initiatives and possibilities.

Suzie Knoll

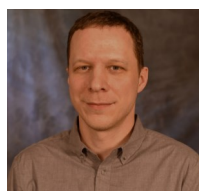
The mission of the Oceana Conservation District is to promote conservation, stewardship and sustainable use of the natural resources in Oceana County through landowner assistance and education.

Staff



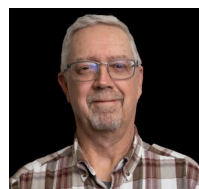
Suzie Knoll, Executive Director

Suzie joined the District in 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.



Adam Chandler, Conservation Technician

With a degree in Natural Resource Management from Grand Valley State University and a GIS certification, Adam has been with the District since January of 2016. Adam works primarily with the Natural Resource Conservation Service staff in our office to provide assistance to landowners who wish to address their natural resource concerns.



Rod Denning, District Forester

Rod joined our team in 2018. Rod not only comes with over 12 years of forestry experience, he is also a GIS specialist and certified arborist. We are thrilled to have him on board to provide education, outreach, and one-on-one forest management assistance to forest owners in Oceana, Muskegon and Newaygo Counties.



Sky Harsch, Stewardship Coordinator

Sky joined the district in 2022 as Stewardship Coordinator, a new position she has been building using her diverse educational and professional background in conservation. In collaboration with District staff, board, volunteers, and partners, Sky manages our nature preserves and coordinates stewardship and restoration activities in Oceana County.



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.



Kari Wilson, Educator

Kari Wilson is a seasoned educator with a passion for guiding children to form deep connections with nature. Teacher Kiki, as she is known to her students, has Master's degrees in education and photography and has over 25 years of classroom teaching experience. Kari develops and implements forest school programming for pre-schoolers and the District's summer day camp program.



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 40 years working in Illinois before transferring to Michigan.



Installing a native pollinator planting

2023 Accomplishments at a Glance

MAEAP verifications (new or re-verified in 2023)	31
Forest landowners assisted	171
Acres enrolled into Qualified Forest Program	3,794
USDA funds farmers received for conservation/restoration	\$1,255,773
Tree/shrub seedlings sold	26,037
Acres of pollinator habitat planted	43
Acres planted with no-till grain drill.....	478
Acres of invasive species treated.....	70
People attended educational field trips and events.....	1,000
Number of hemlock trees treated for Hemlock Woolly Adelgid	9,110
Pounds of hazardous waste collected	26,588
Plastic ag containers collected and recycled	7,000

MAEAP Report



The Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP) is a proactive and voluntary program de-

signed to help farms minimize risks to the environment through a three-phase process:

- 1) Education
- 2) Farm Assessment and Practice Implementation and
- 3) On-farm Verification by a third party.

Farms may be verified in one or more of the following systems: Farmstead, Cropping, Livestock and Forest, Wetland & Habitat. A total of 180 systems on 93 farms have been verified over the past 19 years.

Primary goals for the MAEAP Technician each year are to work with growers to implement environmental stewardship practices that protect soil and water and meet MAEAP verification standards. Cost-share funds are available to implement practices such as emergency farm planning, water use reporting, no-till drill use, secondary containment, anti-backflow prevention, nutrient and pest management and more. The Technician also provides educational opportunities for growers on topics relevant to their current needs and challenges and shares ways they can conserve our local natural resources.



Castle Hill Farm of Elbridge Township was re-verified in 2023 for both Farmstead & Cropping Systems. Farms go through the re-verification process every 5 years.

4 New and 27 Re-verifications in FY 2023

Benona Township

Byl's Lakeview Orchard
Verified: Forest & Cropping

VanAgtmael Orchards
Re-verified: Farmstead & Cropping

American Youth Foundation
Verified: Forest, Wetland and Habitat

Ferry Township
Earthscape Farm
Re-verified: Forest, Wetland and Habitat

Wm Burmeister & Sons
Re-verified: Farmstead & Cropping

Hart Township
Airport View Turkeys
Re-verified: Livestock

Claybanks Township
Jancek Farm
Re-verified: Farmstead & Livestock

Holladay Farms
Re-verified: Farmstead, Crop & Livestock

Elbridge Township
Herrygers Farm—Hart
Verified: Forest, Wetland and Habitat
Re-verified: Farmstead & Cropping

Shelby Township
Herrygers Farm—Shelby
Re-verified: Cropping

Castle Hill Farm
Re-verified: Farmstead & Cropping

Chris Crosby Farm
Re-verified: Farmstead, Cropping & FWH

Weare Township
Kacynski Farms
Re-verified: Farmstead & Cropping

LK VanSickle Farms
Re-verified: Cropping

Malburg Malac
Re-verified: Livestock

VanAgtmael & Sons
Re-verified: Farmstead & Cropping

VanDerZanden Farms
Re-verified: Farmstead & Cropping

In addition to working one-on-one with growers throughout the year, your local MAEAP Technician reached many more farmers in the community at the following programs:

- MSU Research Field Day
- Great Lakes Expo
- Asparagus Day
- MSUE West Central Spring Horticulture Meeting
- Ag & Natural Resources Banquet
- MSU Tree Fruit Educator Breakfast Meeting
- Agroforestry Field Day at Earthscape Farm
- Farming for the Future Field Day
- District-held programming for youth in Oceana County - 3rd grade seedling distribution, 6th grade field trip, summer day camps
- Pesticide Container Recycling
- Pesticide Disposal at the Household Hazardous Waste Collection/Clean Sweep Event
- Ag Scrap Tire Event with Oceana County Farm Bureau



MAEAP Technician Lynda Herremans shares information about MAEAP at an event organized by the West Michigan Agroforestry Partnership at Earthscape Farm in August where participants learned about agroforestry systems and sustainable pasture management.



Oceana Conservation District's MAEAP Technician co-hosted a well-attended 2023 Farming For the Future Field Day with partners at MSU Extension, Oceana County Farm Bureau and the West MI Research Station. Attendees learned about sprayer optimization in specialty crops and observed demonstrations of drones and a Global Unmanned Spray System (GUSS).

MAEAP Award

The Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP) is a voluntary, proactive program that helps farms identify and prevent agricultural pollution risks. Each year, the Oceana Conservation District recognizes one farm that not only has achieved MAEAP Verification, but also embraced the program and made a concerted effort to make improvements to their operations, primarily focused on protecting surface and groundwater. Byl's Lakeview Orchards has been selected as the recipient of the MAEAP Award for 2023.

Paul Byl, and his wife Anne, own and operate over 200 acres in Benona Township near Lake Michigan. Paul and Anne live on the family farm that was established by Paul's father Peter Byl in the 1960's when Paul was 10 years old. Paul purchased half the farm from his father after returning from college in the 1970's and by the early 1990's purchased the entire farm. They raise a variety of crops including apples, asparagus, tart and sweet cherries,

blueberries and peaches. Anne ran the farm's fresh market for many years, offering fresh produce from the farmstead and at the Pentwater and Muskegon Farm Markets.

Paul has a long history of working with USDA and the Oceana Conservation District on conservation practices. In the 1980's he planted windbreaks, reforested other areas of his farm, and adopted a new (at the time) practice of planting cover crops in asparagus fields to prevent soil erosion. In 2007, he worked with the Natural Resources Conservation Service to build an Agri-chemical Handling Facility (AHF) providing secondary containment for storing, mixing and loading chemicals which is important for protecting groundwater. Paul incorporated other practices in the 2000's including the construction of a fueling facility and protection of a heavy use area, a steep driveway that leads to the beautiful farm on top of a hill that was prone to erosion. These two practices were highlighted in the 2018 MAEAP Farm Tour.

In more recent years, Byl introduced multi-species cover crop plantings and a 15-acre pollinator planting, improving soil health and creating more biodiversity. A seasonal high tunnel, otherwise known as a hoop house, was a nice addition during the later farm market years, extending the growing season of produce and flowers for their farm market. Although most of the hard work Byl completed to protect soil and water was completed over many years, it was in 2023 when the Oceana MAEAP Technician Lynda Herremans worked with Byl to go through the MAEAP verification process. Byl's Lakeview Orchards was verified in both Farmstead and Cropping by a third-party verifier within just a few months.

Although farming and family keep the Byl's very busy throughout the year, they find time to be actively engaged in their community. Paul is a passionate, dedicated member of the Great Lakes Energy Board of Directors, a position he has now held for 40 years! The Byl's attend Evangelical Covenant Church in Whitehall and are actively involved at The Ladder in Shelby, an intergenerational community center dedicated to knowing and serving neighbors in the community.

The MAEAP Award will be presented to Paul and Anne Byl of Byl's Lakeview Orchards at the Agricultural & Natural Resources Banquet on March 18th. Please join us in celebrating Oceana County Agricultural producers and their dedication to protecting our natural resources!



Anne and Paul Byl, Byl's Lakeview Orchards, Shelby, MI

Forestry Report



Michigan's Forestry Assistance Program is designed to help private forest landowners understand the

value of actively managing their forest. Whether landowners use their forested property for hunting, fishing, timber production, outdoor recreation, or simply want to sustain a healthy forest, your local District Forester is available to help landowners better understand, manage, and utilize their forest resources.

The role of the District Forester is to provide technical assistance to private landowners, helping them realize the ecological and economic value of their forest and promoting sustainable forest management. Your local District Forester, Rod Denning, provides site visits, helps landowners apply for state and federal assistance programs, and provides referrals to professionals in the forest industry who can develop a comprehensive forest management plan and administer timber harvests. As a certified arborist, Denning can also help identify and evaluate tree health issues.

Last year, 171 landowners contacted Denning for forestry-related questions and services, resulting in 117 site visits on 5,477 acres in the tri-county service area. Over the course of five years that he has worked for Oceana Conservation District, Denning has assisted 903 landowners and visited 581 sites across the region!

As one of the District Forester's priorities, Denning encourages eligible landowners to enroll in the Qualified Forest Program, and last year he helped 25 landowners enroll 3,794 acres into the program. The Qualified Forest Program incentivizes landowners to actively manage private forestland for commercial harvest, wildlife habitat, and general improvement of natural resources. Enrolled landowners receive a 16 mil exemption from the local school operating millage. In order to qualify, non-homesteaded parcels must be greater than 20 acres and a forest management plan must be written by a qualified forester.

The Forestry Assistance Program also serves as a referral service to help landowners connect with professionals in the private sector to write a forest management plan and/or administer a timber sale. In 2023, 30 referrals were made, resulting in 12 forest management plans generating an estimated value of \$21,000 in economic

activity, and 17 timber harvests generating approximately \$197,600 worth of forest products in Michigan.

Providing outreach and education to members in the community, Denning offered nine educational events in 2023 including presentations on the health of our local forests and forest management. Denning also shared his forestry skills and knowledge to a wide audience of curious minds including 5-11 year olds at Nature Day Camp as well as grownups at the Forest Forensics Guided Hike.

One of the highlights of the year for Denning occurred during a site visit in Newaygo County when he stumbled on vegetation that signaled he and the landowner were standing on a rare ecosystem. His article titled "A Rare Oak Ecosystem or Remnant Prairie?" was published in Michigan Forests, a quarterly magazine published by the Michigan Forest Association and is included in this Annual Report.

If you're a forest landowner interested in services that the Forestry Assistance Program offers, please contact District Forester Rod Denning at (616) 920-9775 or rod.denning@macd.org.



District Forester Rod Denning is available to help manage their forest for sustainable timber production, wildlife habitat, and/or optimal ecological health.

Education & Outreach Report



Educator Kari Wilson leading Knee-High Naturalist activities at Doolittle Park

Oceana County residents and visitors heard the call! Perhaps it was the silent-winged, barred owl hooting through the winter forest with its dinner invitation - who cooks for you, who cooks for you aaa-all? Or the evening chorus of spring peepers floating on warm breezes through recently opened windows. Certainly, along the summer lakeshore, waves beckoned with their timeless pull. Or perhaps the call came from within: unplug, go outside, drink in the honey scent of autumn. From our stunning forests, fields, and waterways we heard the call and outside we went - to linger, to learn, to explore, to restore! In 2023, numerous opportunities for outdoor exploration and education were made possible through the generous gifts of time, treasure, and talent from community members, organizations, and local businesses.

We are so grateful for financial donations which enable us to make outdoor learning opportunities available for all interested children and families. In 2023, we were able to offer

needs-based scholarships for both our Forest School Program for Knee-high Naturalists and our summer Nature Day Camps. Over twenty families and 25 children participated in Knee-high Naturalists. Through gently guided experiences and forest school foundational practices, our youngest nature lovers built a solid foundation for educational as well as social/emotional growth and development. As children age out of Knee-high Naturalists we welcome them to our summer Nature Day Camps. Over 50 children attended our summer camps: At the Pond, In the Forest, and On the Farm, with many children attending multiple weeks. An essential component of our camps is our counselor program. At age twelve, aged-out campers are eligible to serve as junior counselor volunteers until age 14 when they may apply to serve as a senior counselor. In 2023, we were pleased to be able to provide our hard-working senior counselors with an increased stipend to support this great learning opportunity.



Knee-High Naturalists making friends at Forest School. Conservation Technician Adam Chandler leading a Nature Camp activity

Over the past few years, as we've developed our Forest School programs, we have heard time and again that grownups want the same opportunity to learn and grow through nature exploration that we strive to provide for children. In 2023, we launched the Forest School for Grown-ups program, a six-week series of weekly classes held in natural areas throughout the county. The first group filled quickly with adults eager to explore and willing to try new things, from carving walking sticks to foraging for nuts and berries. Oceana Conservation District staff led interpretive hikes on areas of specific interest and expertise as well as stewardship activities in preparation to open our new Stony Creek Nature Preserve to the public. By all accounts the inaugural session of Forest School for Grown-ups was a big success!



While staff lead many well-attended education events such as our winter solstice hike and owl prowls, spring birding trips and wildflower walks, many of our offerings rely on the willingness

Education & Outreach Report

of community members to share their knowledge and passions. Among the highlights of 2023, was a Pond Camp visit from reptile expert, Scott Yonkers, with a variety of the many turtles he rehabilitates. Lisa Fleury, MSU Extension nutritionist, joined us at Farm Camp in August with a presentation on 'Eating the Rainbow,' along with Luke Snider of Snider's Turkey Farm who brought several young 'ambassador' birds to provide campers with a hands-on learning opportunity. Many others contributed by leading hikes, foraging experiences, and sharing art and wood working skills. Pond Camp attendees built and installed new bat boxes with materials donated by community members and assistance from local woodworker, Frank Doll. We are fortunate in Oceana



Left: Counselor Josie helps lead the Blind Hike at Camp. Right: Naturalist Anne Pawli leads a pond study in Gales Pond.



Above: Reptile Rehabilitation expert Scott Yonkers teaching campers about local reptiles. Below: Hands-on learning with Knee-high Naturalists



County that so many businesses, organizations, and individuals hear the call to preserve and protect, to reach out and to go out.

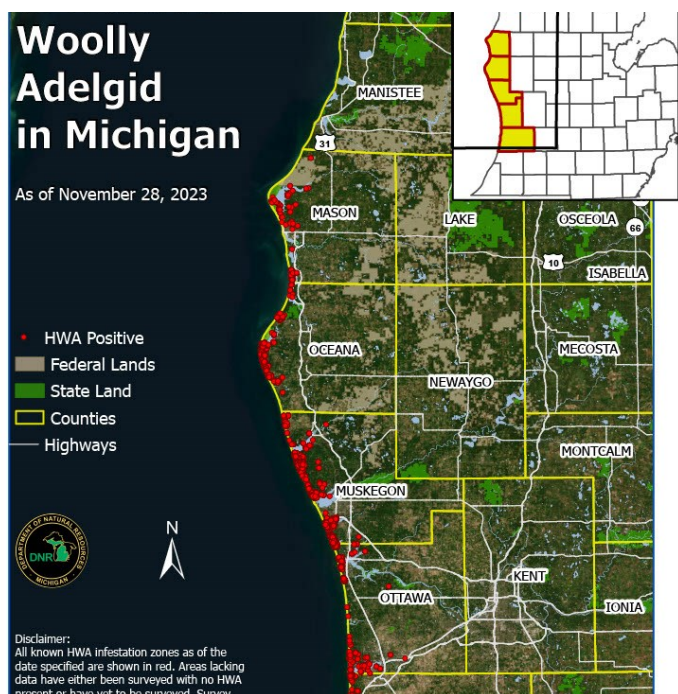


Forest School for Grown Ups Explore Stoney Creek Nature Preserve

Stewardship Report

Invasive Species Updates

As one of seven counties in the West Michigan Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area (CISMA), Oceana County benefits from state and federal grant funds to treat invasive species in forest and wetland areas. Oceana Conservation District works closely with the Ottawa and Muskegon Conservation Districts to implement invasive species treatments in Oceana County. Prioritization is currently going to species that are present in our county in relatively small or isolated populations but pose a high risk of further spread. An “early detection, rapid response” approach enables land managers to act quickly, before the species population grows to the point where it cannot be locally eradicated.



During the 2023 field season, CISMA crews treated 70 acres of terrestrial invasive species on U.S. Forest Service land and private forestland in Oceana County. Target species in 2023 included Japanese Knotweed, Japanese Barberry, Phragmites, Garlic Mustard, Lily of the Valley, Autumn Olive, Multiflora Rose, Amur Honeysuckle, Spotted Knapweed, and Black Locust.

The West Michigan CISMA is also closely monitoring and actively involved in managing Hemlock Woolly Adelgid (HWA) that is prevalent in West Michigan (see map). Unfortunately, 2023 marked another tough year for Eastern hemlocks in Oceana County. Infestations are spreading however, more grant funds were available for Oceana County last year and HWA strike teams based out of the Ottawa, Muskegon and Mason-Lake Conservation Districts were able to treat 9,110 trees in 2023. Recognizing the need for awareness and outreach, we hosted two educational events on HWA in 2023; a third self-treatment training workshop is scheduled in April.

continue to increase, Oceana Conservation District is working with local and state partners to strategize and bring more resources to the county. We’re in the process of developing an approach to protecting what hemlocks we can while developing ways to mitigate the impacts of hemlock loss. More specifically, last year, we developed a plan to create an “Oceana Coastal Conservation Corridor” which aims to enhance resilience and connectivity of vulnerable forestland through a combination of invasive species management, reforestation, and K12 place-based stewardship learning. This project will start in summer

of 2024, pending funding.



Before and After treatment of Japanese Knotweed, an aggressive species with hollow stems that grow 3-12 feet and can damage infrastructure



Stewardship Coordinator Sky Harsch surveys local forest for Hemlock Woolly Adelgid

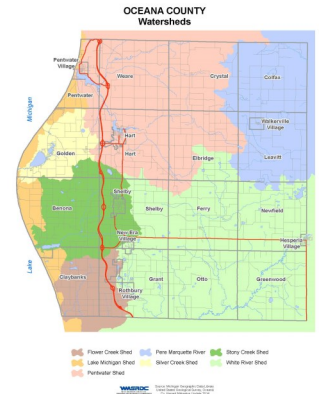
Stewardship Report

Watershed Updates

The West Michigan Watershed Partners (WMWP) is a coalition of local watershed groups in a five-county region in West Michigan. WMWP convenes quarterly to pool resources and share information on watershed planning and management. Notable projects that local partners have completed in Oceana County are highlighted below.

White River Watershed

With funds provided from the community foundations in Oceana, Muskegon and Newaygo Counties, the West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission (WMSRDC) contracted Grand Valley State University to conduct an economic impact study of the White River in 2023. Results showed that the White River generates \$20 million annually, drawing over 35,000 visitors from outside the region each year. The study will serve as justification for future investments in the watershed.



Initiated in 2019 by Trout Unlimited and the White River Watershed Partnership, the White River Watershed Collaborative (WRWC) consists of local communities and governments, state and federal agencies, non-profits, local business owners and White River enthusiasts. The WRWC is working to facilitate collaborative data-driven restoration and protection of the White River Watershed.

In recent years, the White River Watershed Collaborative has invested a lot of time and effort to collect data and identify priorities for enhancing the watershed and fisheries. In 2023, more temperature gauges and monitoring stations were installed in the White River Watershed, offering real-time data and useful information that will advance stewardship activities. Two culverts were replaced on Robinson and Swinton Creeks that will support fish passage and increase resilience to flood damage. Two additional culvert replacements are planned for 2024 on Swinton and Cushman Creeks as well as restoration of 1,000 feet of instream habitat. Several other culverts that block fish from accessing upstream habitats were identified and prioritized for future replacement.

Pentwater Watershed

The Friends of the Pentwater River Watershed, a group that formed in 2021, completed an inventory of road stream crossings in 2023 to assess culverts and identify issues such as fish passage, sedimentation, and erosion. The Friends group also worked with Grand Valley State University last year to create and distribute a survey to 800 residents within the watershed to seek feedback from landowners in the Pentwater River Watershed regarding local water quality and conservation efforts. The data collected will help guide future improvement projects in the watershed, helping the Friends of the Pentwater River Watershed the Oceana Conservation District target their future efforts.



Stony Creek Watershed

A large project is planned and underway at Marshville Dam including the removal of dam remnants, two old bridges and three culverts, and the restoration of 2,500 feet of instream habitat. The project is being coordinated and managed through a collaborative partnership between the Oceana County Parks and Recreation Commission, Oceana County Road Commission, West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission and the Conservation Resource Alliance. Construction is expected to begin in spring of 2024. As a coldwater trout stream, special attention has been given to the protection and restoration of hemlock-shaded areas along the creek.

Silver Creek Watershed

Restorative Lake Sciences have reported promising results from the first year of their Silver Lake biochar filter project. These specially-engineered charcoal filters were installed on docks and drains in 2023 to extract excess nutrients from the water. The filters collected approximately 1.4 tons of phosphorus, improving the clarity of water and density of aquatic plant biomass in the lake. This will help keep algae levels in check, increase desirable fish populations, maintain cool water temperatures, and increase oxygen levels in the water. This project is ongoing.

The porous structure of the Bio-char has excellent adsorption and absorption properties, allowing the filters to extract nutrients from the water as it passes through drains.

Natural Resources Conservation Service



United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is an agency of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) working with private landowners to install or implement conservation practices on their land. NRCS partners with, and works directly through, local conservation districts to educate and assist farmers, ranchers, and rural landowners to protect the natural resources with funds available through federal farm-bill programs.

In 2023, the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) provided \$509,234 to three landowners in Oceana County to address natural resource concerns. EQIP provided funding for agrichemical storage buildings, tree/shrub plantings, windbreak establishment, cover crops, critical area plantings, nutrient and pest management, irrigation water management, prescribed grazing, livestock pipeline and watering facilities, pasture planting, stream crossing, grassed waterways, and more. The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) provided \$746,539 to 21 landowners looking for additional opportunities to expand on existing conservation efforts. CSP provided funding for cover crops, conservation cover, pollinator and monarch habitat plantings, tree and shrub establishment, forest management, and more.

The Shelby USDA Service Center office looks forward to continuing to work with landowners on their agricultural and conservation goals. Call (231) 861-5600 for more information.

Farm Bill Programs

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.

Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)

The Conservation Reserve Program reduces soil erosion, protects the Nation's ability to produce food and fiber, reduces sedimentation in streams and lakes, improves water quality, establishes wildlife habitat, and enhances forest and wetland resources. It encourages farmers to convert highly erodible cropland or other environmentally sensitive acreage to vegetative cover, such as tame or native grasses, wildlife plantings, trees, filterstrips, or riparian buffers. Farmers receive an annual rental payment for the term of the multi-year contract. Cost sharing is provided to establish the vegetative cover practices.

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)

The Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) helps landowners, land trusts, and other entities protect, restore, and enhance wetlands, grasslands, and working farms and ranches through conservation easements. Under the Agricultural Land Easements component, NRCS helps American Indian tribes, state and local governments and non-governmental organizations protect working agricultural lands and limit non-agricultural uses of the land. Under the Wetlands Reserve Easements component, NRCS helps to restore, protect and enhance enrolled wetlands.



Land Preservation

Oceana Conservation District is taking an active role in permanently protecting natural and scenic lands that provide opportunities for education, research and recreation. To date, the District has established two nature preserves, both in Benona Township, thanks to generous families who gifted the land.

Otto Nature Preserve

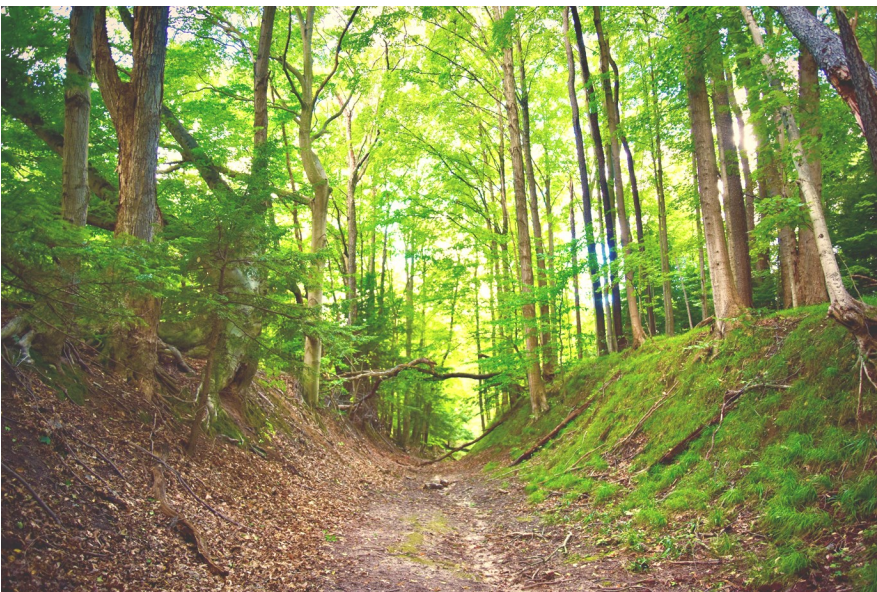
Our local community continues to enjoy the beauty and solace of the trails at Otto Nature Preserve, an 80-acre old-growth forest that was gifted by Dick and Lorayne Otto in 2019. Last year, numerous participants joined Conservation District staff and guest speakers at the preserve for educational events, volunteer activities, and guided group hikes. A new entrance sign and two additional benches will be installed along the trails this spring. The benches were donated by the Otto family in memory of Richard Sr, Richard Jr, and Paul Otto, and by Julie Westerfield in honor of Bob and Stephanie Westerfield.



Otto Nature Preserve is a local gem in Benona Township providing 1.5 miles of trails.

Stony Creek Nature Preserve

Since the donation of the 40-acre parcel to Oceana Conservation District by the Hunter and Hedlund families in 2022, staff have been getting familiar with the cedar swamp and upland habitats along Stony Creek and are working hard to get it ready for public use. Plant and bird surveys have been conducted, unique natural features have been mapped, and partners have visited to see the unique beauty of this soon-to-be nature preserve.



Stony Creek Nature Preserve offers unique topographical features and when it opens in 2025, will offer trails for hiking and access for fishing.

We are currently working with Landscape Architect Pam Blough to develop a master plan for the nature preserve. The plan will lay out parking, fishing access points, and looped trails that showcase the natural and historical features while retaining the delicate ecosystem. Once the master plan is completed, we will forge ahead to clear trails, improve access and install a parking area. A tentative opening day is planned for summer of 2025.

Board of Directors



Eric Herrygers



Garry McKeen



Mary Sheppard



Larry Byl



Denny Payne

Partners



Natalie Bekins
Invasive Species Coordinator



Allissa Conley
Produce Safety Technician

Associate Board Members



John Stephens



Jim Nicholas

2023 Financial Report

October 1, 2022—September 30, 2023

BEGINNING BALANCE \$594,772

REVENUES

State Grants\$271,000
 Local Funding & Grants\$20,568
 Charge for Services.....\$18,870
 Sale of Goods.....\$93,786
 Rentals & Interest.....\$30,352
 Donations\$60,347
 Other Revenue.....\$43,463
TOTAL REVENUES\$538,386

EXPENDITURES

Payroll Expenses\$343,136
 District Operations.....\$129,717
 Plant Materials\$59,041
TOTAL EXPENDITURES\$531,894

CONTRIBUTION TO FUND BALANCE \$6,492

FUNDS HELD @ COMMUNITY FOUNDATION.....\$72,493

ENDING BALANCE.....\$673,757