



**85 Years  
Protecting  
Our Natural  
Resources**

**MASON-LAKE  
CONSERVATION DISTRICT**



FROM DANI'S DESK...

# *Looking Back, Moving Forward – and Why Your Voice Matters More Than Ever*

BY DANI McGARRY

Executive Director

Conservation is about balance; protecting the natural resources we cherish while ensuring they can be enjoyed for generations to come. In 2025, our Conservation District took bold steps forward. We welcomed three new lead staff members who immediately put their passion and expertise into motion. Together, they helped farms adopt best management practices, protected waterways from contamination and sedimentation, restored diverse habitats, planned natural shorelines and pollinator spaces, and managed forests threatened by invasive pests.

Some days, that meant offer-

ing guidance to landowners eager to make a difference on their own land. Other days, it meant rolling up their sleeves—collecting soil samples, planting trees, removing invasive species, gathering stream data, and treating trees to protect our forests. We also pivoted our approach, offering more “for-hire” services to continue conservation projects amid a changing financial landscape. Our work reflects what conservation truly is: hands-on, community-driven, and rooted in a deep love for the land.

As you explore the pages ahead, you'll see the impact of these efforts and the many services your Conservation District provided this past year. These accomplishments mark the final stretch

of our current 5-year Strategic Plan—and they are something we can all be proud of. But they're also just the beginning.

We are now preparing to shape our next five years of conservation work, and this is where **you** come in.

Conservation Districts thrive because they are locally led. We work side-by-side with landowners, local governments, watershed councils, garden clubs, the Fin and Feather Club, Farm Bureau, and countless other partners. **But the true direction of our work comes from the community itself. It comes from you.**

We've launched our “Conservation Needs Assessment” survey to gather your insights on what conservation priorities matter most

in the years ahead. Your feedback goes directly to our Board of Directors and helps guide the decisions that shape our programs, services, and long-term goals. This is your opportunity to influence the future of conservation in our community—your chance to help us protect the places you love.

As we step into the next chapter of our Strategic Plan, I invite you to join us. Lend your voice, share your ideas, and stand with our growing community of conservationists. Together, we can build a stronger, healthier, more resilient landscape for the next five years and far beyond.

**Yours in Conservation,**  
**Dani**

## Lend Your Voice to Guide Future Conservation!

Your Conservation District needs your input. We have launched our “Conservation Needs Assessment” survey to gather your insights on what conservation priorities matter most in the years ahead. Your feedback will be incorporated into our Strategic Planning process, becoming a plan which will guide our efforts in the next 5 years. Is there a water quality issue that is not being resolved? Can we better support and assist our farms in other ways?

You tell us! Please take our survey today. Your survey can enter you to win a gift certificate for free trees and other products from the District!



### BOARD OF DIRECTORS



**SARAH GRABOWSKI**  
Director



**TOM GRABOWSKI**  
Chairman



**DAVE JOHNSON**  
Vice Chair



**CHRIS TRESNAK**  
Treasurer



**MARY CAMPBELL**  
Secretary



**LISA ADAMS**  
Associate Director



**TOM BELL**  
Associate Director



**CATHY SCHINDLER**  
Associate Director



**DEB DEL ZOPPO**  
Associate Director

## DISTRICT STAFF



**DANI MCGARRY**  
Executive Director



**PETE RUSTAD**  
AG Technician



**TANIA HANLINE**  
Conservation Technician



**KAY CASTONIA**  
Administrative Assistant



**ANNA HAWLEY**  
Program Assistant



**JULIA PLACE**  
Project Manager



**HUNTER SPENCER**  
Crew Lead



**SETH HUNT**  
MLCD Crew



**ADAM GLENDENING**  
MLCD Crew



**BAILEY WATSON**  
MLCD Crew



**EMILY FREDRICKS**  
Invasive Species Technician



**JON BEDNARICK**  
CISMA crew

## Join us in celebrating 85 years of local conservation!

**WHEN:** February 19th, 5-8pm (dinner at 6)

**WHERE:** Our Savior Lutheran Church, 765 US-10, Scottville

**PROGRAM:** The Annual Dinner will be held to celebrate conservation success stories from the past year. Open House from 5-6pm, where staff will have table displays to share programs and services available to the public and answer any conservation questions from attendees. Board of Director elections and raffles will also be held during this time. Dinner will begin at 6pm, catered by Pere Marquette Bistro and Catering. Following dinner, a brief presentation will showcase projects of the last year, and those coming in 2026. Conservation Awards will be presented to community members, election and raffle winners will be announced. There is no cost to attend or vote, but donations are appreciated.

**RESERVATIONS:** February 13th by calling 231-757-3707 ext. 5 or visiting [mason-lakeconservation.org](http://mason-lakeconservation.org)

The  
community's  
resource for  
empowering  
conservation



## PARTNER STAFF



**JERRY KASS**  
Natural Resource  
Specialist



**JOSH SHIELDS**  
Forester



**ZACH PEKLO**  
Program Coordinator CISMA



**ALLISSA CONLEY**  
Produce Safety Technician

# Calling all Interested Candidates: Recruiting for Board of Directors and Hosting Elections

The Mason-Lake Conservation District has an interesting opportunity this year for developing the Board of Directors; to appoint one candidate and publicly elect another to the Board to fill vacant seats. Two seats were up for election, but only one candidate emerged. Both seats still need to be filled. We're hoping to fill those seats by recruiting and appointing candidates that are interested in local conservation work to help guide our efforts.

## The Background

Every Conservation District has a five-member board that is locally elected by voters who reside in the District. All elected Directors serve a four-year term and can choose to run for re-election. Our Directors meet monthly, work on committee projects in between regular meetings, and volunteer at major Conservation District events. This is a volunteer commitment, though Directors are reimbursed for training and travel expenses. Anyone with a passion for local conservation work can be a great asset to the Board. Past and current Directors have backgrounds in education, communications, farming and agriculture, forestry, law, business administration, finance and more, leading to a great diversity of experiences that can support our organization and mission.

As an example of Board projects, in 2021, the board completed a five-year strategic plan which supported a staffing expansion, diversifying funding sources for on-the-ground conservation projects, and creating benefits to help support staff and improve retention. Using public feedback, they prioritized projects that would support water quality protection, sustainable forestry and supporting local

agriculture. Since then, the Board has helped to ensure we deliver on this plan, selecting and supporting projects and outreach that align with our goals and helping us keep on track. They have also helped at tree seedling sales, household hazardous waste collection day, native plant sales and outreach field days. The Strategic Plan will be reviewed and updated by the Board in 2026 to chart the District's priorities and growth for the next five years. It's a great time to get involved and start at the ground level of planning locally-led conservation efforts.

## The Election Process

In 2026, two seats were up for election for four-year terms. To qualify, candidates must be legal residents of Mason or the west half of Lake County, over 18, and must submit a petition to run for election 60 days in advance of the election date. However, only one candidate turned in a petition by the deadline, so in addition to the election for that seat, the Board of Directors will also be looking to appoint someone for the second seat.

Per State law governing Conservation District Board Elections, polls will be open during our Annual Dinner on February 19th to vote for one open seat (no write-in candidates are allowed). Residents of Mason or western Lake County that are over the age of 18 and can prove residency may vote at the annual dinner, or as absentee by visiting in person at the office during open hours (8:00 AM-4:30 PM), or by requesting an absentee ballot on or after January 5th. To obtain an absentee ballot, stop by the Conservation District office (655 N. Scottville Rd., Scottville) or call (231) 757-3707 ext. 5. Please note that completed ballots must be dropped off or mailed via postal mail, per election

requirements and must be received by February 19th. The Annual dinner will be held at Our Savior Lutheran Church in Scottville, from 5-8pm. There is no cost to attend or vote, but an RSVP is appreciated by February 13th.

## Recruiting and Appointing Candidates to Fill Vacancies

Since candidate petitions were not received for the second open seat, the Board will accept letters of interest and appoint someone to the vacant seat. This appointment will be as a one-year term, until next year's election when the candidate may choose to run for the remainder of the term. The Board has assessed that a skills gap exists amongst the Board of Directors and hopes to recruit someone that has experience manag-

ing small businesses or non-profit organizations, with some marketing or fundraising experience as well. While the Conservation District is a local government entity, limited funding leads the District to operating like a non-profit organization and these skills would be helpful in supporting the District. This is not required, however, and any eligible candidates may put their names forward for consideration.

Those that are interested in being involved on more of an introductory or trial basis may also apply to be an Associate Director. This volunteer position, appointed as a one-year term, can be involved in all of the same aspects as an official Director, except that they are not allowed to vote on official District business.

## CANDIDATE PROFILES



**TOM GRABOWSKI**  
running for re-election  
to 4-year term

I live in Victory twp with my wife Sarah and children Mathias and Masyn. We farm in Victory and surrounding townships. My family has farmed in the same area since the 1940's. Our farm uses cover crops in our rotations and we no-till whenever feasible. We have done several improvement projects with NRCS. As a person who enjoys fishing in Hamlin lake

and Lake Michigan we strive to minimize the impacts we make on the Sauble and Lincoln river water sheds. In addition to farming I also am a process operator at Oxychem. As a director I enjoy seeing the amount of difference in our community the MLCD makes while volunteering at the tree sale and household hazardous waste cleanup.



This seat on our Board of Directors could be for you! Please submit a letter of interest for appointment to our Board of Directors by visiting mason-lakeconservation.org or emailing executive Director Dani McGarry at dani.mcgarry@macd.org,

## MASON-LAKE CONSERVATION DISTRICT FISCAL YEAR 2025 FUNDING SOURCES

Leveraged funds	Source and Purpose	Amount
Federal Grant Sources	U.S. Forest Service (3 grants) (Invasive species management)	\$25,408
	National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (Farm Bill Assistance / Watershed Focus)	\$62,882
State Grant Sources	Dept. of Ag and Rural Development - Conservation Technical Assistance (on-farm environmental risk assessments, Regen Ag)	\$80,895
	Dept. of Natural Resources - Good Neighbor Authority (4 grants) (Invasive species management on US Forest Service Lands)	\$60,093
	Dept. of Natural Resources (2 grants) Michigan Invasive Species Grant Program (Hemlock Woolly Adelgid Survey & Treat)	\$290,159
	Dept. of Natural Resources - Michigan Invasive Species Grant Program (3 Partner Grants)	\$33,458
	Dept. of Ag and Rural Development Conservation Technical Assistance Initiative	\$52,000
	Dept. of Ag and Rural Development District Operations (funding to meet existing state requirements)	\$40,000
Local Sources	Tri-County Household Hazardous Waste Disposal Program — Counties, Municipalities, Businesses, Individuals	\$96,835
	County Allocations	\$24,000
	Volunteer Time (valued at min. wage)	\$6,032
	Donations, Fundraisers, Fee for Service	\$111,885
2025 Total District Programs*		\$883,647
Federal Farm Bill Funding to Landowners obtained with District staff assistance		\$987,468
Total Funding brought to our Community for Conservation in FY '25**		\$2,754,762

\*Note: This total reflects partial expenditures of 19 grants and funds used in FY '25.

\*\*Multi-year grants total over \$1.8 million; 121 active Farm Bill contracts exceed \$4.182 million

## MASON-LAKE CONSERVATION DISTRICT PROFIT & LOSS FOR FISCAL YEAR 2025

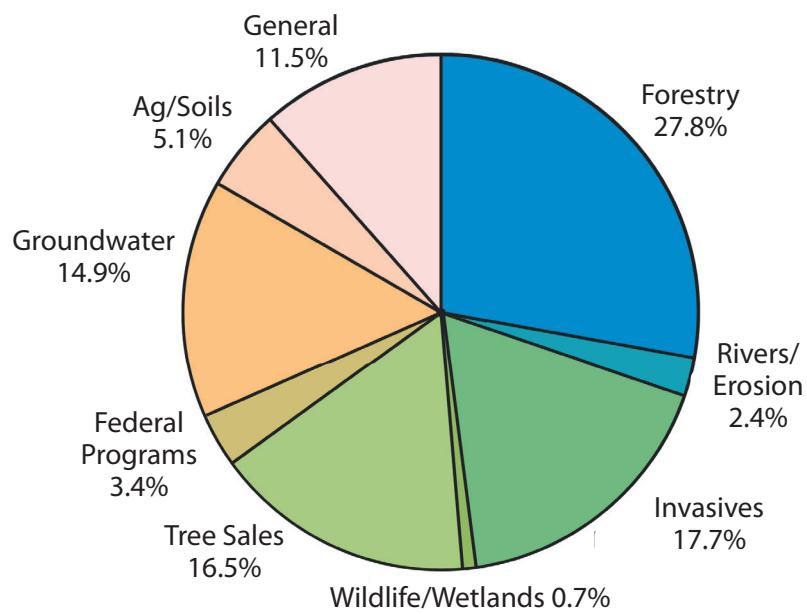
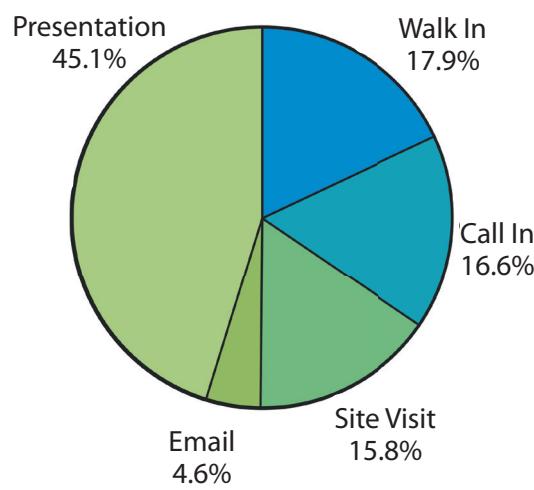
October 2024 through September 2025

Oct '24 - Sep 25	
<b>Ordinary Income/Expense</b>	
Income	
501 · Federal Grant Income	88,290.25
539 · State Grants	523,147.15
540 · Reimbursed Expenses	53,116.91
580 · Local Contribution & Grants	24,000.00
600 · Charges for Products & Services	100,747.52
664 · Interest & Rental Control	1,805.69
671 · Other Revenue Control	11,137.34
Total Income	802,244.86
Gross Profit	802,244.86
Expense	
66000 · Payroll Expenses	713.75
66900 · Reconciliation Discrepancies	18.08
701 · Payroll/Personnel Expenses	549,481.49
726 · Supplies Exp	7,897.18
740 · Vehicle Expense	37,079.05
800 · Other District Expenses	106,590.00
980 · Grant Expenses	76,392.50
Total Expense	778,172.05
Net Ordinary Income	24,072.81
Net Income	24,072.81

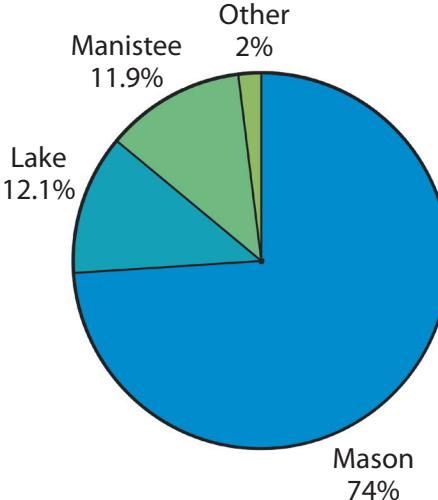
## FY '25 STATS AT A GLANCE

### WHAT ARE OUR LANDOWNERS ASKING ABOUT?

#### CLIENT CONTACTS



#### COUNTIES SERVED



# Volunteer of the Year - George Willoughby



**GEORGE** posing with his new Tree Farm sign

In considering candidates for Volunteer of the Year, we had many generous, dedicated people in our conservation community to choose from. However, one stood out above the rest, as not only a stellar volunteer, but one becoming increasingly “geeked” about conservation. George Willoughby started to volunteer with the Conservation District in recent years, first as a helper during Household Hazardous Waste day. We have rarely seen someone so ecstatic to unload messy and potentially hazardous materials from vehicles. In the barn at the Road Commission, cars are lined up during the event to be unloaded. Contractors and volunteers, including George, are

unloading cars, putting materials on carts or in wheelbarrows, going every which way to sort materials and get them to the proper station for safe disposal. It's often loud, hot and constantly moving. And apparently where George thrives! Staff check in on volunteers to see how they are doing throughout the event, to which George replied, “This is organized chaos! I love this!”

This year with the District, George put in over 20 hours of time just helping us pack tree seedlings for our seedling sale. He took on the monumental task of packing most of our bareroot spruce seedlings last spring, and just happily plugged along at his station, mak-

ing sure every tree was packed up snug and sound until it could reach its final home. He couldn't make it to Household Hazardous Waste Day in 2025, but he was sorely missed, and we know he is already looking forward to 2026.

As he's learned more about what we do, George has also taken steps to learn more about conservation and do more on his property. He's obtained a long-term forest management plan, becoming a certified Tree Farm and he's even pursuing MAEAP verification. We love to see people get excited about conservation, helping out and sharing it with others and George does just that. Congratulations, George!



*Thank You 2025 Volunteers*

Lisa Adams  
 Wayne Andersen\*  
 Karen Anderson  
 Tom Bagwell  
 George Bedker  
 Mary Lou Bedker  
 Tom Bell\*  
 Sarah Bolan\*  
 Justin Bortell  
 Mariette Bortell  
 Rick Bowman  
 Nina Bromley  
 Jeff Bromley  
 Doug Campbell  
 Mary Campbell  
 Julia Chambers\*\*  
 Leslie Cuppett  
 Susan Dains  
 Ed Dains  
 Deb Del Zoppo\*\*  
 Peg Dittmer\*\*  
 Gary Dittmer\*\*  
 Joyce Durdel  
 Steve Dvorak  
 Chris Egeler  
 Jack Epstein  
 Tim Fournier  
 Tom Grabowski\*  
 Sarah Grabowski\*  
 Teddy Heckman  
 Barb Horsley  
 Mark Horsley  
 Jerry Jensen\*\*  
 Brooks Johnson  
 Dave Johnson  
 Jerry Kass  
 Rand Lilly  
 Mark Lipps\*  
 Dan Loney\*  
 Dave Lyles  
 Laura Lyons\*  
 Victor Ma  
 Jeannine Makowski  
 Scott Makowski  
 Nancy McCollough  
 Jim Mills  
 Brandi Mitchell  
 David Moffitt  
 William Neis  
 Liz Pasco\*  
 Russ Peterson\*

Tom Postma  
 Lisa Rokosky\*  
 Cathy Schindler\*  
 Mark Schweppenheiser  
 Armas Soorus  
 Rose Soorus  
 Chris Tresnak  
 Mason Tresnak  
 Rose Uerling  
 Ethan Vanderberg  
 Maddy Weyward  
 George Willoughby  
 Mike Winczewski\*  
 Kathy Winczewski\*  
 Terry Woirol\*

\* Recognized for 5+ years of service   \*\* Recognized for 10+ years of service

# Your Support Makes Conservation Possible

After 85 years of serving as the conservation leader for our local community we've learned that our work is never done in a vacuum but collectively as a community. Looking ahead to 2026, the Conservation District will be embarking on a new five-year strategic planning process which will chart the priorities for the District's conservation efforts in the coming years. While this is always an exciting opportunity, we know from experience that this process can also include challenges. As a primarily grant-funded organization the timing and structure of grant funded projects often take months to research and plan, and then many more months (or years) of waiting to see if the grant will be funded. This funding model can lead to instability for staff, and it is often ineffective for project continuity. This is where you can help! By donating today, your generous support will provide the stable funding continuity the Conservation District needs to continue our critical role of protecting water quality, maintaining healthy, productive soils, supporting healthy and resilient farms, and keeping our forests sustainable in our region. Thank you for helping us to protect and preserve the natural resources in the place we all love and call home.



## Thank You to Our Generous Donors

Your contributions make a significant impact on our environmental efforts and conservation projects. Together, we are making a difference!

46

Total number of donors

\$15,720

Total amount of donations

EVERY GIFT HELPS KEEP NATURE  
THRIVING FOR EVERYONE.

### \$1 - \$99 Contributors

Booher, Amy	Hansen, Leroy	Schafer, Paul
Boyd, Jared	Haverberg, Peggy	Slater, Stacy
Bradow, Alexis	Holmes, Randy	Stickney, Joe & Shannon
Burns, Cathi	Kalmbach, Kevin	Stranz, Terry & Kristina
Buter, Brian & Eric	Mahoney, James	Tacktor, Dennis
Carrier, Walter	Moore, Dori	Taveirne, Edward & Barbara
Castonia, Lesa	PEO Sisterhood Chapter	Trethewey, Ron
Dains, Ed	Peterson, Fred A	Wilkins, Paul & Mary Jo
Fournier, Tim & Ingrid	Peterson, Russ & Shirley	Winczewski, Kathy
Grant, Ken	Schafer, Paul	

### \$100 - \$499 Supporters

Adams, Lisa	Gage, Peg & Kent	Sterley, Shelly
City of Ludington	Mason County Library	Westshore Bank
Dice, Steve	Ohse, Robert	Willoughby, George

### \$500+ Champions

AFFEW	Little Manistee Watershed Conservation
Anonymous	Mason County Garden Club
Fin and Feather Club	Pausing Matters LLC
Hamlin Lake Preservation Society	PM Watershed Council

**MICHIGAN ASPARAGUS**

LaBranz Asparagus Farm  
626 E. Conrad Rd.  
Scottville, MI  
231-690-6106

**Fresh Asparagus**

Pre-Orders Welcome  
May thru June

**VACANT LAND  
RESIDENTIAL  
COMMERCIAL**

**CENTURY 21**  
Bayshore Real Estate

**BRIAN MULHERIN**  
ASSOCIATE BROKER  
brian@c21bayshore.com  
231.690.0872

**2023, 2025  
READER'S  
CHOICE GOLD  
FAVORITE  
REALTOR**

**2025  
SHORELINE  
MEDIA  
READER'S  
CHOICE  
WINNER**

Celebrating  
10 Years in Real  
Estate in 2026

# Conservationist of the Year: Brad Brown of Fresh Air Farms and Brown Cattle Company

Every year the Mason-Lake Conservation District staff and directors decide who they believe to have exemplified the term Conservationist. For 2025, Brad Brown was chosen, not only for his good work in 2025 but for years of outstanding conservation work. Brad is owner and operator of Fresh Air Farms and Brown Cattle Company. He specializes in organic farming and non-GMO, hormone-free

cattle, which is sold in his local shop. Currently, Brad is farming 800 acres, 110 of which are organic, and has 70 head of cattle. Last year, he implemented over 400 acres of cover crops. Brad's mix of rye and radish cover helps to reduce erosion, improve infiltration and protects our waterways from excessive nutrient inputs. Brad doesn't just use cover crops, he has also implemented filter strips along waterways and field edges to reduce sedimentation and nutrient inputs into our streams and creeks. He has also planted trees, native grasses and wildflowers to improve pollinator and wildlife habitat. Brad's commitment to conservation isn't a new endeavor.

Brad has been farming since he was a child on his family's farm in Riverton Township. The family farm grew row crops, vegetables, and raised cattle. His father even used cover crops in his crop rotation at that time. He went on to attend Michigan State University with a major in agriculture business management. After graduating in 2003, he started his own farming operation, Fresh Air Farms, and bought his family farm in 2006. He has been using cover crops and manure management strategies since the beginning. Over 20 years of proper soil management has led to

many benefits including, an increase in soil organic matter and improved CEC values (the soil's ability to hold nutrients and redistribute to plants). According to Brad, "The soil works as it is supposed to, reducing the need

for additional fertilizers". The benefits of these conservation practices don't just reduce fertilizer needs and related costs, they have reduced the need for

insecticides as well. This is due to the natural increase in predatory insects with more plant life available on field edges and cover crops. "Overall, these conservation practices and programs have led to a positive physical change for the soil," says Brad.

While many of these activities were possible with the assistance of NRCS programs, Brad also uses other available resources to help with conservation on the farm. Five years ago, Brad was verified through the Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP). He was verified in both cropland and livestock systems.

Brad believes that MAEAP is a good volunteer program that he can use to better assist in his stewardship over the land. This year, Brad will become re-verified, showing off his MAEAP signs out in front of his beef shop. He also continues to be an avid attendee to the conservation district's workshops and farm tours, where he can increase his knowledge of conservation topics and share with his neighbors.

The Mason-Lake Conservation District would like thank Brad Brown for his outstanding conservation efforts and congratulate him on receiving this year's Conservationist of the Year award.



## 2026 Conservation Events

*Please mark your calendars and join us for all of the great things we have planned this year! Some details are still to be determined. As the events get closer please call our office at (231) 757-3707, or visit our website [www.mason-lakeconservation.org](http://www.mason-lakeconservation.org) for more information!*

**(Highlighted events are those needing volunteer helpers!)**

- **January 21st** Seminar: Land Conservation Easements in Mason and Lake Counties, Ludington
- **January 29th** Seminar: Winter Grower Meeting, 9am, Scottville
- **January 31st** Pre-orders for tree seedlings, beachgrass, native seeds, open online and via order form
- **February 19th** Annual Dinner, Open House and Election, 5pm, Scottville
- **February 26th** Invasive Species Parter meeting of North Country CISMA, 10am, Baldwin
- **March 6th** Tree Planting and Care Workshop, 1pm, Baldwin
- **March 13th** Deadline for Tree Seedling pre-orders
- **April\*** Volunteer Training for Stream Team Leads
- **April\*** Earth Day Celebration, booths, presenations, Ludington
- **April 24th** Tree Seedling Pickup, 2-6 pm, Mason County Fairgrounds
- **April 25th** Tree Seedling Pickup, 9-noon, Mason County Fairgrounds
- **April 25th** Tree Seedling Pickup, 10-noon, Wenger Pavilion, Baldwin
- **May\*** Volunteer Stream Monitoring on Little Manistee, Big Sable, and Lincoln Rivers
- **June\*** Lincoln River Watershed Town Hall Meeting
- **June\*** Spring Pasture Plant ID Field Day, Mason County
- **June\*** Farm Field Day - Manistee County
- **July\*** Free well water Nitrate Screening, Mason County
- **July\*** Invasive Species Field Workshop
- **July\*** Field Day: Protecting Rare Habitats - Dry Sand Prairies and Pine Barrens, Lake County
- **July\*** Tree Farm Field Day
- **August 15th** Household Hazardous Waste Collection Day, 9 am - 1 pm, Scottville
- **September\*** Native Plant Sale (plugs, wildflower seed, beachgrass)
- **September\*** Lincoln River Watershed Town Hall Meeting
- **October\*** Volunteer Stream Monitoring on Little Manistee, Big Sable, and Lincoln Rivers

*\*Join our e-newsletter to get up to date information on events and services!*

# Invasive Species Management - A Year in Review

BY ZACH PEKLO

NCCISMA Program Coordinator

The North Country Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area (NCCISMA) works collaboratively across a six-county coverage area, including Mason and Lake Counties, to protect natural resources from the impacts of invasive species. In Fiscal Year 2025, NCCISMA managed invasive species on a number of sites, for a combined 56.5 acres in Mason County and 33 acres in western Lake County. Additional program work included management of terrestrial invasive species on US Forest Service lands through the Good Neighbor Authority partnership. NCCISMA also conducted at-cost treatments for private property owners, completing 37 sites in Mason County and 1 site in western Lake County. These programs addressed invasive phragmites, Japanese knotweed, Asian bittersweet,

Japanese barberry, European frogbit, tree-of-heaven, garlic mustard, and other regional priority species.

Outreach efforts continued to focus on reaching off-road vehicle (ORV) riders with invasive species prevention messaging to reduce the spread of invasive plants along trail networks. Efforts also targeted aquatic invasive species, with staff participating in the statewide "Aquatic Invasive Species Landing Blitz" during the week of the 4th of July. In total, outreach included 66 events, such as booths and presentations, resulting in over 2,300 face-to-face interactions, as well as 12 articles and interviews, reaching nearly 65,000 people.

Together, these management and outreach efforts raise awareness on how to reduce the spread of invasive species, restore native habitats, and strengthen long-term stewardship across public and private landscapes for a healthier ecosystem.



**ORV COMMUNITY EVENT** (Irons ORV blessing) where NCCISMA reached riders with invasive species prevention messaging

## Now Providing Invasive Shrub Management Services

BY: SETH HUNT

Field Crew

As a Conservation District, it is essential that we continually adapt our services to meet the evolving needs of our community. In recent years, many landowners in Mason and Lake Counties have expressed increasing concern about the spread of invasive woody shrubs on their properties and the inability to manage them. One of the most prevalent species contributing to this issue is autumn olive (*Elaeagnus umbellata*).

Autumn olive is a deciduous shrub native to Asia that was introduced to the United States in the 1830s. For decades it was widely promoted as a beneficial species for wildlife habitat by providing food and cover. However, its invasive characteristics have since become very apparent. The species produces abundant seeds with high germination rates, allowing it to quickly establish in disturbed sites. Once estab-

lished, autumn olive often forms dense thickets that outcompete native plant communities, reduce biodiversity, and alter local ecosystem function.

In response to these growing concerns, the Mason-Lake Conservation District field crew has begun assisting landowners with the management of autumn olive, as well as other invasive shrubs such as Japanese barberry (*Berberis thunbergii*) and multiflora rose (*Rosa multiflora*). Our crew handles smaller infestations that are not generally desirable jobs for contractors. Similarly, not many contractors in our area are certified to use herbicide, so our crew is able to assist with retreatments, following larger scale mechanical removal of shrubs. We invite interested landowners and community members to contact our office if they are dealing with invasive shrubs on their property or would like to learn more about treatment options. If you are interested in having the MLCD field crew manage your invasive shrub infestation or pro-

vide treatment recommendations, you can request a free quote or information

via email ([seth.hunt@macd.org](mailto:seth.hunt@macd.org)) or over the phone (231-239-2877).



**ATTENDEES** observe Forester, Josh Shields, demonstrate autumn olive removal techniques at a workshop held at Pere Marquette Conservation Park in summer 2025.

# Hemlock Woolly Adelgid Program Overview

Hemlocks play a pivotal role in the ecological function of our area. They stabilize dunes, support cold-water trout streams, and provide dense winter cover for native wildlife. With long, sweeping branches and deep green, flat needles, hemlocks bring a distinctive elegance to any yard. Both ecological and aesthetic qualities are compelling reasons for landowners to protect their trees.

Hemlock woolly adelgid (HWA) is an invasive, aphid-like insect that establishes at the base of needles and feeds on hemlock sap. Feeding stress typically leads to hemlock death within 10 years of infestation, if unmanaged. HWA has been confirmed in 11 counties since its first detection in Ottawa county in 2015, and continues to spread through river corridors and the Lake Michigan shoreline. Early de-



tection, monitoring, and treatment are critical to manage its spread to protect our hemlock resources.

## SURVEY TYPES

There are two types of surveys we perform when conducting HWA work. Detection surveys determine whether HWA is present on a

property. While the insects are too small to distinguish with the naked eye, November through April they shelter and reproduce in prominent white "woolly" ovisacs on the undersides of needles. HWA statewide protocol states that if HWA is present on a parcel of land, there is a 75% chance it will be found during a properly conducted detection survey. If an infestation is detected, a delimitation survey is conducted. Staff measure position, size, health, and infestation status and associate this to a numbered tag affixed to trees. These data provide necessary information for planning treatments.

## TREATMENT TYPES

There are two ways in which we treat hemlock for HWA. Trunk injection is most frequent, where small holes are drilled into a tree and 2 mL of imidacloprid, an insecticide, is injected into each hole. While this chemical takes 1-2 years to reach the needles and kill the insects, it offers 5-7 years of protection afterward. A landowner should start monitoring for HWA 5 years post-treatment. We also use basal bark applications, where imidacloprid is sprayed onto the tree's bark from the base to "breast height" (4.5 ft). This method is more cost effective than injection and equally effective, but has application rate restrictions due to the higher risk of the pesticide "drifting" into the surrounding environment compared to injection. Each acre treated is limited to ~85



inches of trunk diameter treated per year, so basal bark applications are typically reserved for small trees. Another sprayable chemical used by our field staff is called dinotefuran. This chemical offers significantly faster uptake, being able to start killing HWA within two weeks of application. However, compared to imidacloprid the chemical's longevity is much shorter, expected to only be effective for 1-2 years, and the cost is prohibitively higher for grant-funded work.

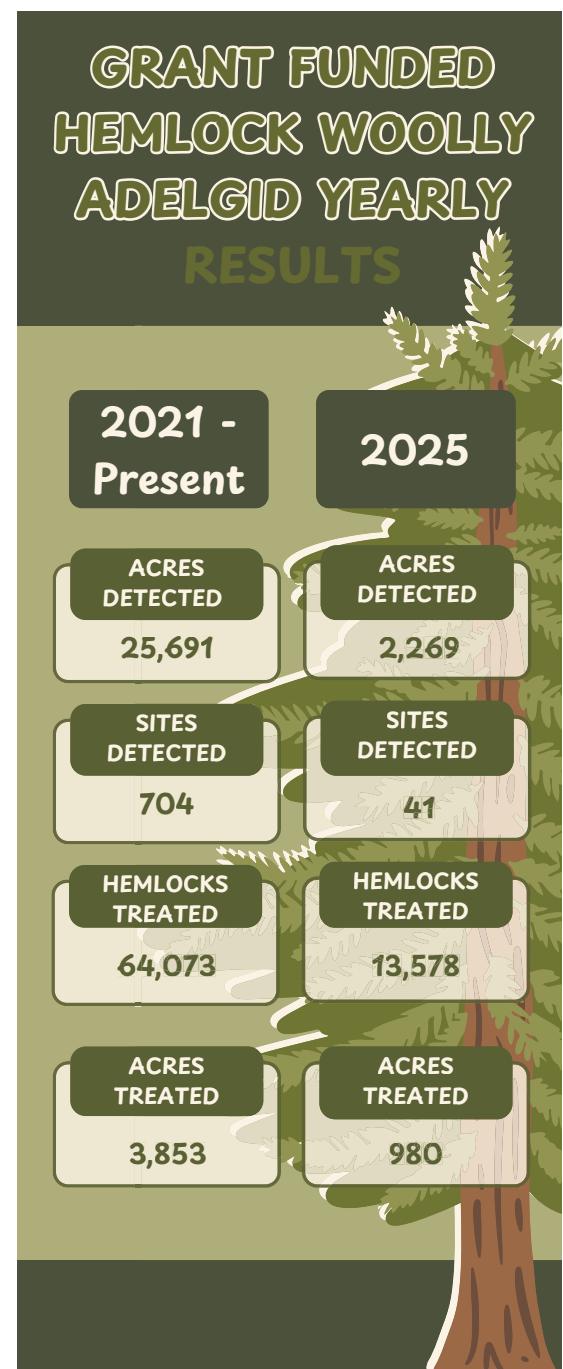
While both imidacloprid and dinotefuran can provide several years of protection from HWA, many often wonder what comes next after the effectiveness of treatment diminishes over time. As protection tapers, a retreatment cycle will likely be needed to maintain tree health. Statewide, our partners are currently pooling research to develop shared monitoring protocols and more efficient approaches for identifying when hemlocks should be retreated to help guide long-term management across Michigan's HWA impacted regions. At this time, retreatment is expected to occur only when reinfestation is confirmed.

## REMAINING GRANT FUNDS:

In 2025, Mason-Lake CD continued HWA management through a grant from the Michigan Invasive Species Grant Program through the Department of Natural Resources (DNR). This grant allowed us to treat hemlock trees on private land at no cost to landowners, provided they fit into the criteria written into the grant. However, as grant funds wind down, we are starting to switch to a "for-hire" based program to keep offering services. This for-hire program makes our crew available at-cost for landowners interested in protecting their trees and covering the cost of HWA

treatment (see our "Hemlock Forest Protection" on page 11 for more information on our at-cost program).

As a way to continue providing hemlock treatment in ecologically important areas, we've teamed up with US Forest Service and DNR to survey and treat hemlock on public lands using Good Neighbor Authority funds. This funding keeps our trained field staff on the ground doing important invasive species work to help slow the spread of HWA.



# Hemlock Forest Protection Continues Despite Funding Shifts

BY: HUNTER SPENCER

Field Crew Lead

As state grant funding is delegated farther north to address new Hemlock Woolly Adelgid (HWA) infestations, the Mason-Lake Conservation District has had to get creative to continue providing HWA treatment services locally. This year, we launched a for-hire program to help landowners protect their hemlock trees. Without grant funding to help cover costs of private-lands treatments in Mason County, landowners are now responsible for the cost of services. The good news is that our trained, dedicated crew is fully equipped and ready to help.

In many cases, treating hemlock trees can be more cost-effective than removal. For properties with several hemlocks, treatment typically ranges from \$25–\$30 per tree, with a \$100 minimum. This structure allows our field crew to work one-on-one with landowners to provide quotes that fit their needs and budgets. At a minimum, we encourage homeowners to treat trees in key areas of their yard such as those near the house, garage, or shed. This protects infrastructure and minimizes further spread.

Retreatment could be necessary after about 5–7 years as initial treatment begins to lose effectiveness. Research is ongoing in Michigan.

It's also important to consider that hemlock trees are currently under quarantine in Michigan. This means that any hemlock trimmings or branches must not be moved off property from the months of March – October unless you meet certain criteria. For more information about quarantine restrictions, call our office. These restrictions can make removal very cumbersome and may add extra time and cost to the tree removal process.

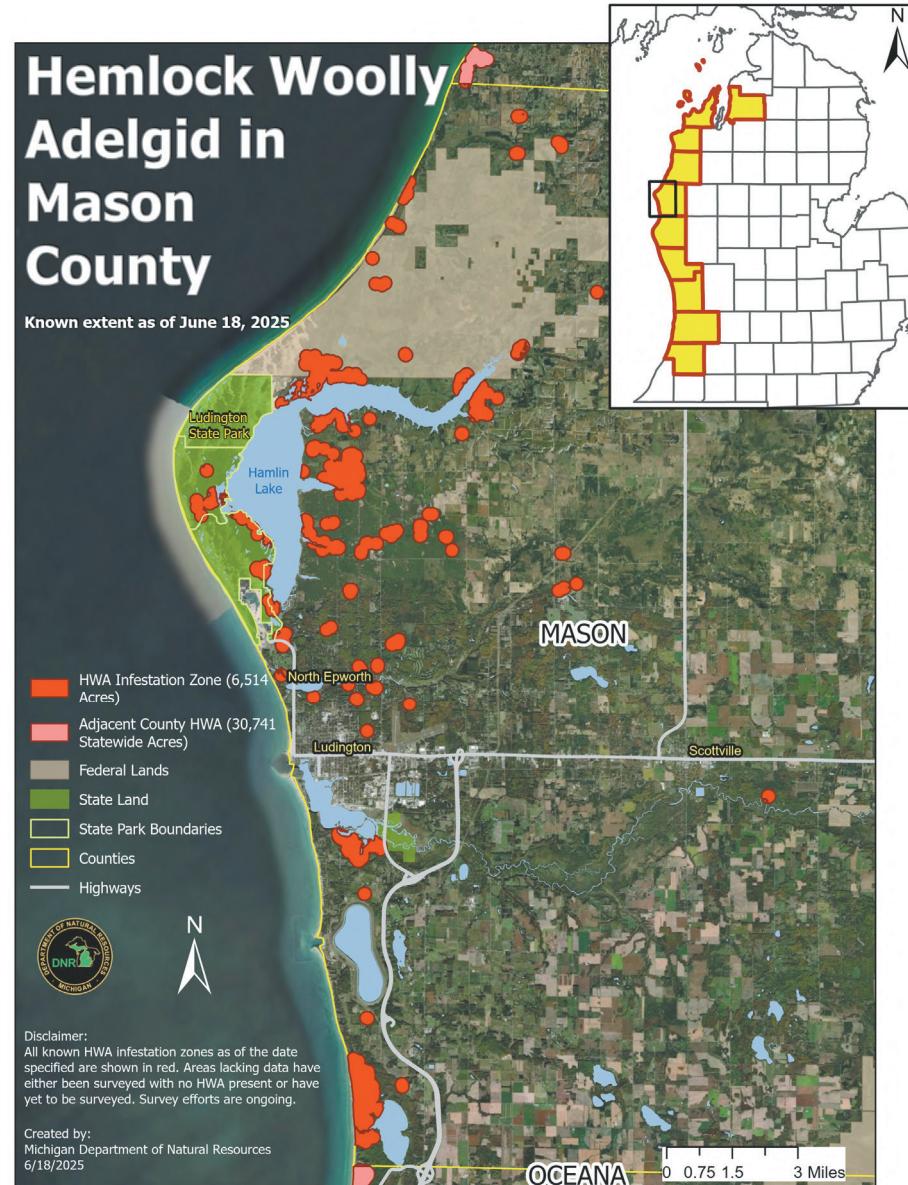
This year served as a soft launch of the for-hire program, with a goal of treating at least 5,000 diameter inches of hemlock. We exceeded expectations by doubling that total during the 2025 treatment season. Combined with a busy season of completing the remaining grant-funded work, we are proud of what the crew accomplished.

In 2026, we hope to build on this momentum to protect as many hemlock trees as possible. Now is the time for interested landowners to reach out so they don't miss their opportunity to be added to the treatment list.



## Hemlock Woolly Adelgid in Mason County

Known extent as of June 18, 2025



Getting started is easy. You can scan the QR code on this page, or contact our office directly. Our team will visit your property to estimate the number of hemlocks and total treatable inches to generate a cost estimate. You will then receive a quote and contract for treatment. Between January and April, the crew will return to perform a delimitation survey (measure and tag your trees) in preparation for summer treatment. We look forward to continuing hemlock forest protection in our service area and hope that landowners are as excited to save their hemlocks as we are!

Scan here to request a FREE quote!

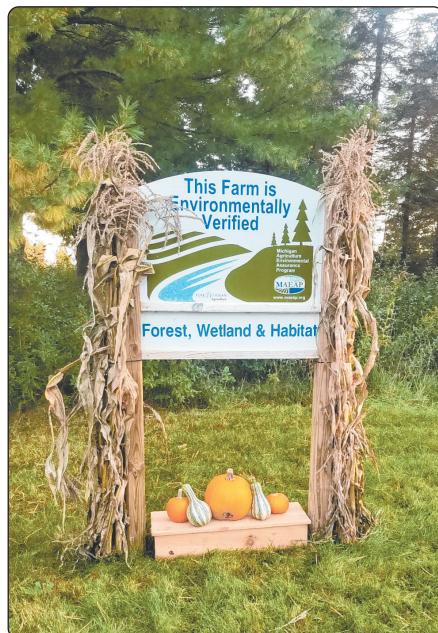


# Recognizing Environmental Stewardship on Farms and Forests in 2025

BY: PETE RUSTAD

Ag Technician,  
Mason-Lake Conservation District

The Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP) is an innovative, proactive, and voluntary program for farms and landowners of all sizes to minimize environmental pollution risks. Land can be “environmentally verified” once any pollution risks have been mitigated. There are currently more than 6,300 verifications across Michigan. Many can recognize MAEAP verified farms by the white sign that they receive, in recognition of their top stewardship efforts. Farms and forest lands can be verified in any of the four systems that might apply to their operation, including Farmstead, Cropping, Livestock, and Forest, Wetlands and Habitat.



To pursue verification in the MAEAP program, the landowner must go through a three step system. Step one is to attend an educational event. These events are held virtually and on-farm where producers can learn about the program and receive credit towards verification. Step two is a site visit with the local technician to conduct an on-farm risk assessment to get a sense of any potential

environmental risks on the farm. This visit would include an assessment of a number of things including chemical storage (fuels, pesticide, fertilizer), setback distances from wells and surface water, emergency preparedness, pesticide/fertilizer application record keeping, and livestock facility maintenance amongst many other potential environmental risks. To become verified, the landowner must comply with the criteria in the MAEAP risk assessment, which meets all Generally Accepted Ag Management Practices (GAAMPs) for the state of Michigan. The technician assists the farm throughout this process and helps to connect them with other resources along the way. Once the farm has met all criteria for reducing risk on the farm, the third and final step is a verification visit with a third-party verifier from the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (MDARD). When verified, the landowner will receive a sign that shows the neighbors and potential customers that the farm is environmentally verified in MAEAP and is a top environmental steward.

Becoming MAEAP verified minimizes the risk that natural resources located on your property will be negatively impacted by runoff, erosion, or spills. In many cases, when a technician comes out to visit, everything is already in good condition and few additional improvements are needed. Other times, improvements to current operations may be required to obtain verification. Everything discussed regarding farm or forest operations is 100% confidential under MAEAP. This is intended to keep communication lines open between growers and Conservation District staff to help address any environmental issues that may arise.

To help improve any issues on the farmstead, MAEAP provides a cost share program to offset financial burden. Common cost share practices can include concrete pads for fuel areas or mixing and loading chemicals; manure compost

pads; secondary containment liners for chemical storage, and water drainage improvements. Technicians also provide guidance on other cost share programs through the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). This helps farmers and landowners understand that there are opportunities out there for financial assistance to create a more environmentally-friendly farm operation.

There are great incentives that come with being MAEAP verified.

Verification recognizes your hard work and environmental stewardship in the community, it is commonly used as an excellent marketing tool for direct sales, provides discounts on insurance through Farm Bureau, cost sharing on resource improvement projects, and also has the benefit of providing Restricted Use Pesticide (RUP) credits, which are needed for many farmers to maintain professional credentials.

## Fiscal year 2025 MAEAP Re-verifications (18):

### MASON COUNTY (13)

- Cold Stream Farm (Cropping, Farmstead) of Freesoil Township
- Dittmer Farm (Cropping, Farmstead) of Riverton Township
- Larsen Farms (Cropping, Farmstead, Livestock) of Victory Township
- Briggs Farms (Cropping) of Custer Township
- Bushel Basket Orchards (Cropping) of Summit
- J.L Longhorns (Cropping, Farmstead, Livestock) of Custer Township
- Rolling Dice Meadows (Forest, Wetlands, and Habitat) of Logan Township

## Fiscal year 2025 MAEAP New Verifications (6):

### MASON COUNTY (5)

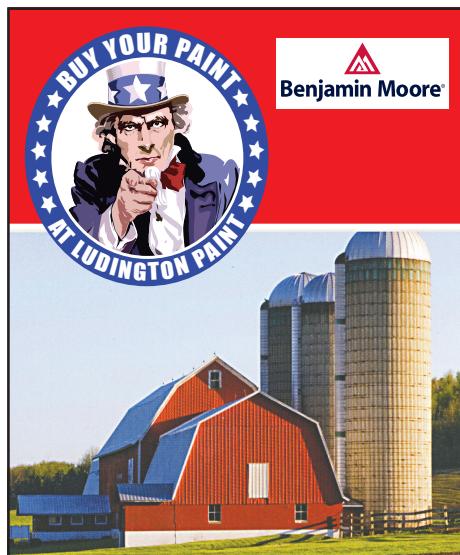
- Sable River Farm (Forest, Wetlands, Habitat) of Freesoil Township
- Briggs Farms (Farmstead) of Custer Township
- Big Sable Farms (Cropping, Farmstead, Livestock) of Grant

### MANISTEE COUNTY (1)

- Road's End Ranch LLC (Forest, Wetlands and Habitat) of Maple Grove Township

### MANISTEE COUNTY (5)

- West Wind Orchards (Cropping) of Arcadia Township
- Camp Tosebo (Forest, Wetlands, and Habitat) of Onekama
- Every Other Brother Club (Forest, Wetlands, and Habitat) of Norman Township
- Brixstone Farms (Cropping, Farmstead) of Onekama Township



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# SPRING 2026 TREE SALE ORDER FORM

## SPRING 2026 TREE SALE ORDER FORM

MASON - LAKE  
CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

Office Use Only	
Order Number	Date Received
Processed By	

### Accepting Pre-orders

**ONLY**

Minimal stock for sale after deadline and at pick-up day. All orders are filled on a first-come basis and subject to change based on nursery availability.

### FINAL DATE TO ORDER:

Friday, March 13th, 2026

### Shop Online!!

For full product listing, bulk ordering options, special orders, detailed info on species, habitat, etc. call or visit [mason-lakeconservation.org](http://mason-lakeconservation.org)

### Pick-Up Information

#### Mason County Fairgrounds

Community Building  
Friday, April 24<sup>th</sup>, 2 - 6 PM  
Saturday, April 25<sup>th</sup>, 9 - Noon

#### Baldwin - Wenger Pavilion

(Behind Jones' Ice Cream)  
No Extras for Sale  
Saturday, April 25<sup>th</sup>, 10 - Noon

### Key

💧 Prefers Wet Areas

☁ Tolerates partial shade  
(Ok in Sun)

☀ Full Sun Needed

\* Non-native species in MI. Be cautious of aggressive growth habits and habitat suitability

\*\* Species listed as threatened or endangered in Michigan

Evergreen Seedlings by the 50s	Size	Age	Habitat	50 Tree Bundle	# of Bundles	TOTAL
Jack Pine	6-12"	2-0	☀/dry	\$23.00		\$
Red Pine	4-8"	2-0	☀/dry	\$23.00		\$
White Pine	4-8"	2-0	many	\$30.00		\$
White Spruce	6-12"	2-0	☁/💧	\$30.00		\$
Evergreens by the 10s	Size	Age	Habitat	10 Tree Bundle		TOTAL
Black Hills Spruce Transplants*	6-12"	2-1	dry	\$13.00		\$
Tamarack Seedlings	8-15"	2-0	☀/💧	\$16.00		\$
White Cedar Transplants	24-36"	2-2	☁/💧	\$60.00		\$
White Spruce Transplants	10-20"	2-2	☁/💧	\$23.00		\$
Hardwood Trees by the 10s	Size	Age	Habitat	10 Tree Bundle		TOTAL
American Chestnut** stock shows blight-resistance	18-24"	1-0	☀/dry	\$70.00		\$
American Plum	18-24"	1-0	☁	\$22.00		\$
Bitternut Hickory	12-18"	2-0	mesic	\$30.00		\$
Black Cherry	12-18"	1-0	many	\$15.00		\$
Bur Oak	12-18"	1-0	many	\$15.00		\$
Paper Birch	12-18"	1-0	many	\$18.00		\$
Red Mulberry**	12-18"	1-0	many	\$20.00		\$
Sugar Maple	8-15"	2-0	many	\$12.00		\$
Yellow Birch	12-18"	1-0	☁/💧	\$20.00		\$
Shrubs by the 10s	Size	Age	Habitat	10 Tree Bundle		TOTAL
Allegheny Serviceberry	12-18"	1-0	many	\$15.00		\$
American Elderberry (black fruit)	12-18"	1-0	☁/💧	\$18.00		\$
Buttonbush	12-18"	1-0	☀/💧	\$15.00		\$
Gray Dogwood	12-18"	1-0	💧	\$15.00		\$
Highbush Cranberry	12-18"	1-0	☀/💧	\$22.00		\$
Hazelnut - American	12-18"	1-0	many	\$20.00		\$
New Jersey Tea	12-18"	1-0	☀/dry	\$23.00		\$
Red Osier Dogwood	8-15"	1-0	☀/💧	\$10.00		\$
Sand Cherry	12-18"	1-0	☀/dry	\$18.00		\$
Sandbar Willow	12-18"	1-0	☀/💧	\$20.00		\$
Snowberry	12-18"	1-0	☁/dry	\$25.00		\$
Extra-Large Single Yard Trees	Size	Habitat		Price per Tree	Number of Trees	TOTAL
American Elm	2-3'	☀/💧		\$10.00		\$
Butternut	3-4'	☀/mesic		\$15.00		\$
Paper Birch	4-5'	☁/💧		\$15.00		\$
Sugar Maple	4-5'	many		\$18.00		\$
White Oak	3-4'	many		\$18.00		\$
Native Grass & Wildflower Seed Mixes	Price by Acre (8lbs PLS)		Price by 500 sq ft		Quantity for Area	TOTAL
Pollinator Wildflower Mix *	\$380.00		\$8.00			\$
Native Grass Mix *	\$170.00		\$5.00			\$
Little Bluestem *	\$285.00		\$6.00			\$
Big Bluestem *	\$135.00		\$5.00			\$
Switchgrass *	\$125.00		\$5.00			\$
Canada Wild Rye *	\$285.00		\$6.00			\$

Large Single Fruit Trees*		Diam.	Price/ Tree	Number of Trees	TOTAL
Apple - Gold Rush	(Apples are semi-dwarf stock, EMLA 111)	1/2"	\$25		\$
Apple - NovaSpy		1/2"	\$25		\$
Apple - Pristine		1/2"	\$25		\$
Crabapple - 'Chestnut' (G.30 Rootstock)		1/2"	\$25		\$
Pear - Shenandoah		5/8"	\$27		\$
Pear - Seckel		5/8"	\$27		\$
Peach - Flamin' Fury "Cold Hardy"		5/8"	\$30		\$
Small Fruit & Vegetables*		Size	Price	# of Bundles	TOTAL
Strawberry rootstock - Flavorfest- June-bearing (disease resistant, 25 per bundle)		crown	\$15		\$
Strawberry rootstock -Seascape- Everbearing (disease resistant, 25 per bundle)		crown	\$15		\$
Asparagus Crowns - Mary Washington (10 per bundle)		crown	\$10		\$
Ground Cover Plants		Size	Price	# of Bundles	TOTAL
American Beachgrass */dry (100 per bundle)		18-24"	\$35		\$
American Beachgrass */dry (500 per bundle)		18-24"	\$130		\$
Bunchberry (10 per bundle)	cloud/drop	1-6"	\$30		\$
Conservation Products (books and more available online!)		Size	Price	# of Items	TOTAL
Plantskydd - liquid deer repellant		1 qt.	\$25		\$
Plantskydd liquid (sprayer not included)		1.3 gal.	\$80		\$
Plantskydd powder- you mix and spray		1 lb.	\$40		\$
Plantskydd granular shaker pack		3.5 lb	\$36		\$
Mosquito Barrier (garlic juice)		1 qt.	\$30		\$
Mosquito Barrier (garlic juice)		1 gal.	\$84		\$
"Trees Planted - Keep off" metal signs		7.5x11"	\$3.00		\$
Wood Duck House		ea.	\$28		\$
Bluebird House		ea.	\$12		\$
Wren House		ea.	\$10		\$
Watering bags		20 gal	\$25		\$
Pine stake only - 1" square		5ft	\$2.75		\$
Tree Protector Tube with pine stake		5 ft.	\$6.00		\$
Tree Wrap (rodent deterrent)		3 ft.	\$3.00		\$
Plat Book - Mason Co. 2023		-	\$30.00		\$
Plat Book - Lake Co. 2026		-	\$35.00		\$
Wire Marking Flags - 10 per bundle		23"	\$5.00		\$

**Tree Workshops!**

Check our website and facebook for details on upcoming workshops in February and March to help choose, plant, and maintain your trees.

**Questions?**

Call (231) 757-3707 ext. 5 or  
Email: mason-lake@macd.org

Pre-Tax Total	\$
6% Michigan Sales Tax	\$
Donation to Mason-Lake CD	\$
ORDER TOTAL	\$
Check Number	#
Circle Pickup Location: Ludington or Baldwin	

**Note:** It is unlawful for these trees, shrubs and other plants to be resold, in accordance with the Insect Pest and Plant Disease Act. PA 189 of 1931 as amended

**DESCRIPTIONS****DECIDUOUS TREES**

**Allegheny Serviceberry** (Amelanchier laevis) or Smooth Shadbush. Native to MI. Mature Height: 15-40'. Ranges from a shrub to a small tree. Grows best in average, medium, well-drained soil in full sun to part shade. Found in upland forests and forest edges. White, spring flowers yield reddish or purple berry-like fruit which is consumed by birds and mammals. Buds are browsed by mammals; flowers attract native bees and predatory insects that prey on insect pests.

**When Purchasing Apple or Pear Trees:**

Be sure that you have two *different varieties* (i.e. 2 different apples) planted within 50' of each other so that they cross pollinate to get fruit. Call or see our website for pollenizer recommendations. Or add a crabapple to improve pollination!

**Note:** All plants are bare-root unless noted and healthy at time of distribution, but due to a variety of factors, there are no guarantees of long-term survival. Notify the Conservation District of any issues with your order within 1 week of pickup.

**Payment Information**

Payment must be made in full at time of order. Send complete order form and payment to:

Mason-Lake Conservation District  
655 N Scottville Rd  
Scottville, MI 49454

We accept all major cards.  
Please put payment info here, order online or call our office.

Card #: \_\_\_\_\_

Exp Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Sec Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Name on Card: \_\_\_\_\_

**American Chestnut** (Castanea dentata) Endangered in Michigan. Mature Height: 50-75'. "Apparently blight free with some resistance to Chestnut blight" shown at the nursery; no genetic modification. Plant in full sun in moist, well drained loamy soil. Once a major component of Eastern hardwood forests. There is NO guarantee that seedlings will survive chestnut blight.

**American Plum** (Prunus americana) Native to MI. Mature Height 15-25'. Easily grown in average, dry to moist, well-drained soils in full sun to part shade. A thicket forming shrub with early spring white flowers in clusters. Produces a small shiny bright red fruit which can be made into jellies. Fruit attracts birds and other wildlife.

**Bitternut Hickory** (Carya cordiformis) Native to MI. Mature Height: 80-100'. Full sun to full shade on rich soils of upland and bottomland forests. Nuts are consumed by animals but are not preferred due to bitterness. Several moth species use the foliage. Popular wood for smoking food.

**Black Cherry** (Prunus serotina) Native to MI. Mature Height: 50-80'. Grows in full sun to part shade in dry to well-drained soils of closed canopy or open woods. White flower clusters in spring become small dark cherry clusters. Fruit is consumed by numerous species of birds and mammals. Supports native pollinators and honeybees; Wood is prized for furniture. Cherries (without pits) can be eaten raw or used in pies.

**Bur Oak** (Quercus macrocarpa) Native to MI.

**Make a Tax-Deductible Donation!**

The Mason-Lake Conservation District is a 170(c) tax-deductible organization. The Seedling Sale is our major annual fundraiser. Any donation will be applied towards conservation projects in our District. Alternately, consider us in your estate planning by donating to our endowment with the Community Foundation for Mason County. You can directly impact conservation in our area for years to come!

**Mature Height:** 60-80'. Plant in full sun. Does well in average, dry to medium, well drained soils. Acorns are an important food for wildlife.

**Butternut** (*Juglans cinerea*) or White Walnut. Native to MI. Mature Height: 60-70'. Plant in full sun on rich soils, especially near streams. Nuts are eaten by squirrels, other mammals and humans. Inner and outer bark was historically used for medicinal purposes; BUTTERNUT IS SUSCEPTIBLE TO THE BUTTERNUT CANKER, AN EXOTIC FUNGUS THAT KILLS THE TREE.

**Hawthorn** (*Crataegus macrosperma*) Native to MI. Mature Height 8-23'. Long thorns, white blooms in spring. Does best in well drained loamy soil but will tolerate some clay and is often found growing in dry sandy ground with jack pine and oak. It takes 4-8 years to bear fruit. Primarily pollinated by midges. It is a host plant for several butterflies, supports pollinators and is a great food source for wildlife.

**Paper Birch** (*Betula papyrifera*) Native to MI. Mature Height of 70'. Grows best in moist, fertile soils and along streambanks in sun to partial shade. Known for its beautiful white bark and canoe materials for native Americans. Seeds and sap attract birds and small mammals. Great for caterpillars, sawflies, moths and other pollinators.

**Red Mulberry** (*Morus rubra*) Listed as threatened in the state of MI. Mature Height: 35-50". Very Versatile, adapting to all light, soil type and moisture conditions. It blooms in early spring. Edible fruits are great raw or in pies, jams, juice breads, muffins, and cakes. Warning: Unripe fruit and milky sap from all parts have low toxicity if eaten. Enjoyed by humans and wildlife.

**Sugar Maple** (*Acer saccharum*) Native to MI. Mature Height: 80-100'. Full sun to full shade in rich, well-drained soils. Abundant nesting and cover tree for numerous species of wildlife. Very popular for wood products, particularly veneer and maple syrup production; structure for smaller mammals and birds. Great for pollinators.

**White Oak** (*Quercus alba*) Native to MI. Mature Height: 50-80'. Grows in full sun to full shade in rich, moist, acidic, well-drained loams. Found in mesic and dry forests, to well drained bottomlands. Acorns eaten by numerous wildlife species; used by butterfly larvae. An important lumber tree because of high-grade wood and is singularly used for whiskey barrels due to unique aromatic properties.

**Yellow Birch** (*Betula alleghaniensis*) Native to MI. Mature Height: 70-100'. Full sun to part shade in rich, moist to wet soils. Has a characteristic odor and flavor of wintergreen in the crushed bark of young twigs. The wood of yellow birch is one of the most valuable timbers in Michigan and is of special importance in furniture and veneers. Seeds and sap attract birds and small mammals. Great for caterpillars, sawflies, moths and other pollinators.

## SHRUBS & SUB-SHRUBS

**American Elderberry** (*Sambucus canadensis*) Native to MI. Mature Height: 5-12'. Grow in medium to wet, well-drained soils in full sun to part shade. Tolerates a wide range of soils, but prefers moist humus. Spreads by root suckers to form colonies. Common to wetlands and streambanks. Tiny lemon-scented white flowers appear in large flat topped clusters in June.

**American Hazelnut** (*Corylus americana*) Native to MI. Mature Height: 10-16'. Easily grown in average, medium, well-drained soil in full sun to part shade. Prompt removal of root suckers will help maintain plant appearance and if desired help prevent thicket formation. White/green in spring/summer flowers yield an edible nut that is consumed by birds, mammals and humans. Purple fall foliage.

**Bunchberry** (*Cornus canadensis*) Native to MI. Mature Height: 3-9". A dwarf, subshrub dogwood that makes an excellent ground cover. Easily grown in average, medium moisture, well-drained soils in part shade. Prefers moist, organically rich, acidic soils. Dry soils should be avoided. White, petal-like bracts appear in spring which ripen into bright red berries loved by birds and mammals.

**Buttonbush** (*Cephalanthus occidentalis*) Native to MI. Mature Height: 5-12'. Full sun to part shade, grows best in moist humus soils but adapts to a range of soils except dry. Commonly found in marshes and along stream banks. It produces white pincushion-like flowers that are both showy and beneficial for pollinators. Spherical ball-like fruits produce nutlets for waterfowl, birds and small mammals.

**Gray Dogwood** (*Cornus foemina*) Native to MI. Mature Height: 8-20'. Best grown in evenly moist to wet, rich, loamy soils in full sun. Will adapt to a variety of soil types including sand and clay. Tolerant of some light shade. Grows in marshes, swales, swamps, peatlands, bottomland forests and the banks of waterways. White flowers spring to early summer.

**Highbush Cranberry** (*Viburnum opulus* var. *americanum*) - Native to MI. Mature Height: 8-10'. Tolerates a wide range of soils but prefers consistent moisture in full sun to part shade. It has showy white blooms in spring and edible fruits that are great for jams and jellies. Purple to red fall foliage. A good choice for pond or stream edges and hedgerows.

**New Jersey Tea** (*Ceanothus americanus*) Native to MI. Mature Height: 3-4'. Low bushy, drought tolerant shrub. Easily grown in average, dry to medium, well-drained soils in full sun to part shade. Best in sandy loams or rocky soils with good drainage. Native to dry open sandy plains and prairie-like areas, dry savannas. Tiny, fragrant white flowers in summer attract pollinators and wildlife forage on the fruits. Dry leaves used as a tea substitute during the Revolutionary War.

**Redosier Dogwood** (*Cornus sericea*) Native to MI. Mature Height: 6-9'. Thrives in a wide range of habitats. Best grown in organically rich, fertile, consistently moist soils in full sun to part shade. Performs well in

wet locations. Late spring/summer flowers attract pollinators (birds, butterflies, etc) and become showy white berries eaten by waterfowl and deer in fall. Stems have a bright red color.

**Sandbar Willow** (*Salix interior*) Native to MI. Mature Height: 6-22'. Prefers full sun. Grows best in moist to wet soils along shores, river banks, swamps and swales. Typically a large, multi-stemmed shrub that spreads vigorously. Important pollen and nectar source for early pollinators.

**Sand Cherry** (*Prunus pumila*) Native to MI. Mature Height: 2-5'. Can spread widely through suckering. Grows best in well drained soils in full sun. Very drought tolerant. Makes a nice low hedge or ground-cover. Spring, nectar rich blossoms support beneficial insects and pollinators. Fruits are loved by birds and wildlife. Fall foliage fiery red-orange.

**Snowberry** (*Chiococca alba*) Native scrambling, vine-like shrub that may reach about 25 feet in height with support. Commonly reaches 10 feet in height with support. Grows in part shade to full shade with moist soils. Flowers bloom from February to September.

## EVERGREENS

**Black Hills Spruce** (*Picea glauca* var. *densata*) Native to South Dakota Black Hills area, exotic to Michigan. Mature Height: 30-60'. Very similar in all aspects to white spruce, except that it prefers dry soils and is drought tolerant, so a good option if you like the white spruce look but have dry soils.

**Eastern White Pine** (*Pinus strobus*) Native to MI. Mature Height: 50-100'. Grows best in full sun to part shade in mesic, fertile well drained soils. Pinecone seeds are eaten by birds and mammals; young stems are browsed by mammals; excellent nesting habitat for bald eagles and other birds of prey. Uses include construction lumber, finishing and cabinetry, furniture. Avoid growing near any currants or gooseberries which host white pine blister rust.

**Northern White Cedar** (*Thuja Occidentalis*) or Arborvitae (tree of life) Native to MI. Mature Height: 20-40'. Grow in average, medium moisture, well-drained soils in full sun to part shade. Does well in alkaline soils as well as poorly drained wetlands, bogs and forested ravines. Seedlings are heavily browsed by white-tailed deer; cedar stands are important winter cover and food for wildlife.

**Jack Pine** (*Pinus banksiana*) Native to our area. Mature Height: 50'-75'. Commonly found on dunes and places of dry sandy to sandy loam soils. Shrubby when young, developing gnarled appearance when mature. Host tree for rare Kirtland's warbler.

**Red Pine** (*Pinus resinosa*) Native to MI. Mature Height: 60-120'. Grows best in average, medium moisture, well-drained sandy loams in full sun. No tolerance for shade. Commonly grown for timber as lumber or utility poles. Young trees can be bushy in form, serving as wildlife cover.

**Tamarack** (*Larix laricina*) Also called American Larch.

Native to MI. Mature Height: 50-75 ft'. A deciduous conifer that grows in all sorts of wet places, open or forested, shores and sometimes on drier ground. Young cones are a vivid bright purple and needles turn a pretty yellow in fall before dropping. Best grown in moist, acidic, well-drained soils in full sun. Tolerates some light shade.

**White Spruce** (*Picea glauca*) Native to MI. Mature Height: 40-60'. Does best in moist, well-drained soils in full sun and good air circulation. Tolerates some light shade. Found in swamps, mixed forests, bogs, stream borders and dunes on mostly mesic to dry loams and alluvium soils. Tolerant of many soil types. It is an important nesting tree for birds. Foliage, twigs, and seeds are consumed by birds and mammals.

## FRUIT TREES

**Chestnut Crabapple** - Mature Height: 12-15'; Harvest: September; Rootstock: Geneva 30 – semi-dwarf. Rootstock is cold-hardy and fire blight resistant. An excellent pollinator for other apples. Creamy white flesh is fine-grained and crisp, with a sweet, nut-like flavor that is great for fresh eating, cooking or making jellies. Yields 2" crabapples. Plant with a different variety to pollinate.

**Gold Rush Apple** - This medium to large apple is a late season, disease resistant dessert apple. Resistant to scab and mildew, and moderately to fireblight. Considered an excellent choice for edibility, food plots and wildlife. USDA hardiness zones 4-9. Plant with a different variety to pollinate.

**NovaSpy Apple** - Mature Height: 12-15'; Harvest time: early to mid-October; Rootstock: EMLA7 – semi-dwarf. The fruit has a sweet, pleasant flavor, making it very good for fresh eating. It bakes well and is a good keeper. This variety has shown good resistance to apple scab. Rootstock is exceptionally cold-hardy, and disease resistant. Plant with a different variety to pollinate.

**Pristine Apple** - Produce outstanding fruit with good disease and pest resistance. Medium to large golden apples. Fruit ripens in summer and has a soft crunch. Resistant to apple scab, fire blight, cedar apple rust and powdery mildew. Needs full sun in well drained fertile loam. Plant with a different variety to pollinate.

**Flamin' Fury "Cold Hardy" Peach** - A very attractive peach. The fruit is medium to large, very firm with excellent color. The trees are vigorous and productive with low susceptibility to bacterial spot.

**Seckel Pear** - A small pear with rich yellowish-brown skin when fully ripe. One of the best-quality dessert pears. Ideal for the home garden. Tree is vigorous, hardy and productive. Partially self-fertile.

**Shenandoah Pear** - Mature Height: 15-20'; Harvest: mid-September; Rootstock: OHxF97 - standard. Fruit: large pear, sub-acidic flavor. This variety is blight resistant. Shenandoah stores very well for up to five months without breaking down. This European pear variety produces a standard size tree, is hardy and productive. Plant with a different variety to pollinate.



**NO-TILL DRILL** planting into wheat stubble (photo by Symon Cronk)



**TECHNICIAN PETE RUSTAD** describes the properties of soil health to a client during a visit for soil health analysis.

## Protecting Soils through Regenerative Agriculture

**BY: PETE RUSTAD**

Ag Technician,  
Mason-Lake Conservation District

There are a variety of ways in which one can assign value to land. You can assess it by the value of the commodities it yields such as corn, beef, oil, wood pulp, residential development potential, etc. You can try and calculate the value of the ecosystem services that it provides in the absence of human development, such as water filtration and retention, carbon sequestration, or habitat for rare species. You can even give it emotional value by embracing the sense of place and belonging that land can provide to those who have tended the same area for many generations. Humans embrace a wide diversity of value systems that often come into conflict with one another and make our collective relationship with land difficult to define, let alone act on. At the Mason-Lake Conservation District, we strive to embrace a diversity of value systems and promote land stewardship principles that take into account the consequences of multigenerational land use that has negatively impacted the health of our agro-ecological systems in Western

Michigan, while also considering the food, energy and material needs humans and obstacles faced by farmers who struggle to implement sustainability measures that may be financially burdensome.

One of these stewardship principles that we strive to promote is no-till agriculture. Tillage is an ancient agricultural practice, but so too is no-till, and it has experienced a surge in popularity with the advent of the regenerative agriculture movement. Tillage, or turning soil over in preparation for planting, is an effective way to mitigate weeds, incorporate plant residue, and aerate the soil. However, these positive consequences are often short-lived and outweighed by long-term negative impacts to soil health. Tillage breaks up vital soil aggregates that take years to form, even in healthy soils, and provide soil structure that is able to resist compaction, transport and retain water and nutrients, resist wind and water erosion, provide habitat for mycorrhizal fungi and other vital soil-dwelling organisms, amongst many other things. Soil aggregates are small, pillow-like soil clumps that form around plant roots and are held together by sugar-laden root exudates that plants pump

into the soil as a byproduct of photosynthesis. The quality of aggregation in soil ecosystems is often a good proxy for the overall health of that ecosystem. Tilling unfortunately breaks these aggregates apart which can ruin years or even decades of progress made by nature all for the benefit of one growing season. No-till equipment provides a way to plant crop seeds while also helping to protect some of these characteristics.

The Mason-Lake Conservation District has a no-till-drill for rent for those in Mason, Manistee, and Lake counties who are interested in this practice. In the summer of 2025, there were 15 renters who used the drill for a total of more than 500 acres. The drill can be calibrated to accommodate for seed size, depth of planting, and seed density, all while causing minimal disturbance to the soil and invaluable aggregates below.

Another tenet of regenerative agriculture is to keep the soil covered, often by the incorporation of cover crops. A common question we have received regarding no-till is how to terminate these cover crops without using herbicide or tilling. To address this, the Conservation District is in the process of acquiring another piece of equipment:

a crop roller crimper. A roller crimper is a very simple piece of equipment that mechanically breaks or "crimps" the stalks of cover crops. This kills the cover crop by depriving them of the ability to transport water and nutrients, and leaves their flattened stems on the surface of the soil. This crimped layer provides a natural mulch to stymy weed growth, but can still be planted into by a no-till drill.

Every farm has its own unique issues, needs, and resources. Regenerative agriculture is not prescriptive, but rather a set of tools that can be strategically applied within farm-specific contexts. Not every farm can (or should) put an immediate halt to tilling, but the district wants to make as many tools available to those who want to explore these options for rebuilding their soils. These tools will be integral to a new generation of farmers who take into account competing value systems that meet the needs of both people and nature. For a free Soil Health Assessment, more information on regenerative agriculture, or if you think your farm could make use of the no-till drill or roller crimper, please contact Pete Rustad at [pete.rustad@macd.org](mailto:pete.rustad@macd.org), or 231-613-4507.



**STEVE KIMM** discussing seedlings planted and protected with 5-feet tall tree tubes in the lowland forest.



**STEVE KIMM** discussing the first year of the native wildflower/grass planting.

## Forestry Assistance in 2025: habitat Improvements, field days and timber tax deductions

By JOSH SHIELDS

*FAP forester and wildlife biologist with Manistee Conservation District (MCD) and Mason-Lake Conservation District (MLCD)*

For more than 11 years I have served as your Forestry Assistance Program (FAP) forester and wildlife biologist! Fiscal Year 2025 was just as exciting as any other year! I had the privilege of meeting with 171 landowners equating to 6,381 acres of land. During these site visits, I provided information about habitat management practices that helped landowners see their goals and objectives come to fruition! These site visits resulted in 367 referrals, whereby landowners connected with professionals and programs (e.g., financial assistance programs through the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to implement practices such as getting a written habitat management plan, implement forest thinning (including timber harvesting), planting native vegetation, and controlling invasive species. I also helped landowners enroll in beneficial programs related to FAP – this included 1,674 acres enrolled in the Qualified Forest Program (QFP); five parcels assessed for the Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP) Forest, Wetlands, and Habitat A\*Syst (FWH\*A\*Syst); and seven parcels inspected by me for certification in the American Tree Farm System (ATFS). For those of you who have at least 20

acres of forest and are not living on the parcel, QFP is a property tax reduction program that might be of interest. MAEAP FWH\*A\*Syst a state-specific habitat verification program that provides a way for you to examine and improve your current management practices in order to minimize negative impacts to the land and the water. And if you are specifically interested in adopting more sustainable forestry practices, ATFS is a national certification program that provides a way for you to examine and improve your current management practices.

One of the most rewarding aspects of my job is getting to teach workshops and give other types of presentations about natural resources – these events provide a fantastic space for landowners, professionals, and other members of the community to interact and learn from each other. In Fiscal Year 2025 I was fortunate enough to take part in 34 outreach events reaching 1,153 participants! Topics covered included general habitat management practices; importance of native plants; historic changes in forest types; planting native trees and shrubs; planting native wildflowers and grasses; management of invasive species; wild, edible, and medicinal plants and fungi; and careers in natural resources.

One major highlight is from this past



**MICHIGAN FORESTRY Assistance Program**

July, when I had the pleasure of leading a forestry and wildlife habitat field day at ~68 acres of land in Mason County, owned by Steve and Kristen Kimm. This field day was an excellent opportunity to showcase the fantastic stewardship of Steve and Kristen Kimm, and to gather a diverse group of professionals and

landowners. Organizations represented by speakers and participants included District staff, NRCS, U.S. Forest Service, Michigan Forest Association, and Michigan

Audubon, and there were numerous landowners present, representing a range of interests in terms of habitat management goals.

We covered many topics while exploring the Kimm land! The first stop was a conifer plantation dominated by native red pine and non-native pitch pine, where we discussed the challenges of implementing forest thinning when the acreage and volume is low, especially when a component includes a non-native species such as pitch pine. We then discussed the ecological impacts and control methods for non-native invasive Scots pine (tree) and autumn-olive (shrub). Following a riveting discussion of invasive species, we examined an area where Steve and Kristen planted native deciduous and coniferous trees with tree tubes to protect them from white-tailed

deer (an important ecological restoration practice). We also discussed restoration of non-forested habitats, focusing on the planting of native wildflowers and grasses. Since the native seed on the Kimm land was just planted in May of 2025, there was an additional conversation about what to observe and expect during the first year of a practice like this. After leaving the wildflower/grass field we made our way to another conifer plantation and discussed the challenges of blue spruce monocultures – this species is native to North America but not native to Michigan. We ended the field tour in a forest dominated by native tree species such as sugar maple. In the upland component of the forest, we examined perimeter fencing meant to exclude white-tailed deer, so that seedlings (particularly native sugar maple and other deciduous species) in those areas can become larger trees. In the lowland component of the forest, we examined native white-cedar and yellow birch (both extremely ecologically important tree species) seedlings that were planted and protected with tree tubes.

If you would like to learn more about how FAP might benefit you, call me at 231-889-9666 (Office Phone) or 989-220-9236 (Mobile Phone), or email me at [joshua.shields@macd.org](mailto:joshua.shields@macd.org).

# Many Changes in a Federal Agency Supporting Local Conservation

BY: JERRY KASS

Natural Resource Specialist, NRCS

Over the past 12 months, you may have seen a few new faces in the Scottville Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) office. We have had three Acting District Conservationists (DC's, the head NRCS position locally) rotate through the Scottville office. I covered the office October until May, when Soil Conservationist, Justin Brown, came into the office to help. You may have recognized Justin from his time as the Conservation District MAEAP Technician. Justin had to return to his home office in Reed City in September. After the government shutdown ran its course, Soil Conservationist Katy Robinson stepped into the Acting DC role. Katy was here with us until the end of January. Although the DC position has been a revolving door, the Scottville Office has been able to plan and implement many conservation activities in Mason and the west half of Lake Counties.

Thanks to the tireless efforts of Justin and Katy, we were able to secure just shy of \$1 million in funding from Farm Bill Programs, to be used on local projects. These funds were spread out over the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) and the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). We had 19 new CSP contracts funded and 7 EQIP contracts funded. These numbers are lower than in past years but, considering the year we had in the federal government, we are proud to have funded these new conservation program contracts. Along with the new contracts funded, we



have also implemented many practices over the last year.

In total for 2025, \$250,000 has been given to local landowners who have implemented conservation practices, or activities, on their land. Landowners have applied various practices, including over 2,100 acres of cover crops, 3,500 acres of improved nutrient management, 300 acres of prescribed grazing, 1 new high tunnel system (similar to a greenhouse) and 6 irrigation system sprinkler upgrades or efficient use of water. These practices are improving our soil, water, air, and plant health. Mason and Lake County landowners have also implemented many practices to improve wildlife habitat. These practices include 40 acres of invasive species removal, 35 acres of native grasses and wildflower plantings, and thousands of trees planted. The past year has seen many changes come to NRCS and the Scottville Field Office. Changes are expected to continue occurring in 2026, but we are hopeful they will bring more conservation to the counties and allow us to more effectively assist our local landowners.

I would like to share a special thank

you to Justin Brown and Katy Robinson for stepping up as the acting District Conservationist. Their efforts kept the Scottville Field Office rolling, and they both have improved the efficiency and

success of the Scottville Office. We look forward to 2026 and the continued efforts of our staff and local landowners such as yourself in improving the natural resources of Mason and Lake Counties.

## Obligated Funds Over the Last Five Years

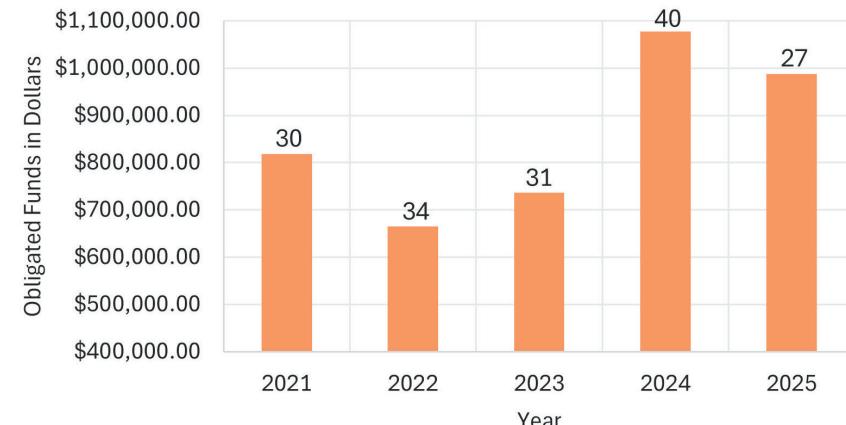


Figure 1. Obligated Farm Bill funds over the last five years. Numbers above bars represent total new contracts for that year.



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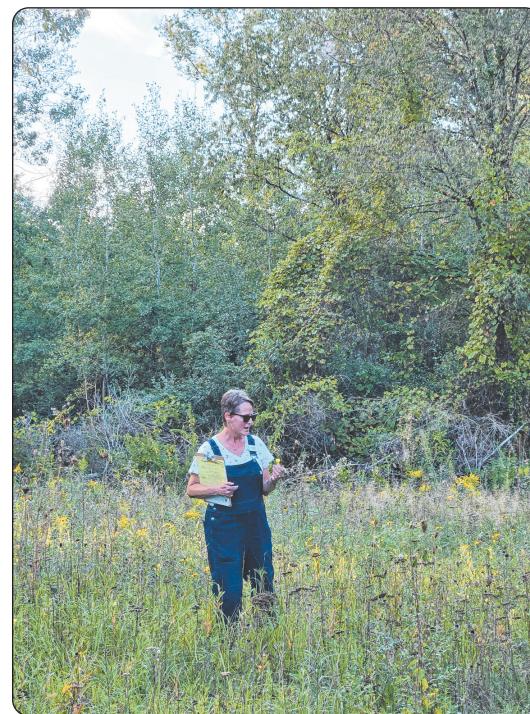
# Growing Native Plants from Seed: At Home and In the Field

BY: TANIA HANLINE

Conservation Technician

Winter is an ideal time to begin growing native plants from seeds, especially species that require natural seasonal cues to germinate. Many native wildflowers, grasses, and shrubs have evolved to germinate only after prolonged cold and moist conditions, such as those experienced during winter. By using simple outdoor or refrigerator-based methods during winter, you can boost your seed-starting success come spring. Most native seeds need cold-moist stratification, a process that breaks down germination inhibitors. A simple technique to provide this stratification is through winter sowing. To begin, select a tray, container, or pot for planting. Make sure that the container has drainage in the bottom. Fill the container with a few inches of fresh potting soil then sow the seeds on the surface and cover them lightly. Some seeds require light to germinate including very tiny seeds and milkweed. Covering the seeds completely is not necessary. If seeds are large, then bury them at a depth that is twice the width of the seed. Set the container somewhere outside where it will have access to any snow or rain. A protected wall along your homes is a good location. You can also place a layer of leaves on top of the container to help retain moisture and reduce any exposure to dry, cold winds. This mulch should be removed in early spring. Snow, rain and fluctuating temperatures provide exactly the cues native seeds need. As spring temps begin to rise, the seedlings will germinate. After seedlings have a few sets of leaves, you can transplant them into larger pots or a prepared bed. Another method is refrigerator stratification. This technique involves mixing seeds with moist (not wet) sand, vermiculite or potting soil in a sealed bag and storing them in the refrigerator. The specific stratification time varies for all native plants but is generally 30-90 days. Propagation protocols and requirements for most native plants can be found on the Native Plant Network website (<https://nbn.org>.

rngr.net/propagation/protocols). Label bags with species name and the date stratification began. If you leave the seeds in the refrigerator too long, they will begin to germinate in the bags. This



**TANIA PRESENTING** on proper site preparation and planting techniques of wildflowers at Bradow Farms during Farm Field Day.

is just Mother Nature's reminder that they've had enough fridge time and are ready for a tray. After stratification, sow seeds indoors under lights or outdoors once temperatures moderate. This technique offers more control, especially for species with tricky germination requirements. Regardless of method, using well drained, sterile potting mix is essential to reduce damping-off (rotting) and other seedling diseases. Growing natives from seed not only makes restoration and landscape projects more affordable, but it also ensures local genetic diversity (when seeds are collected locally or sourced from a Michigan seed producer), which is critical for climate resiliency and wildlife habitat. By starting seeds over winter, land stewards and gardeners can produce hardy, regionally

adapted plants that are ready to thrive by spring. With a small investment in time and materials, you can help expand native plant populations and support the pollinators and ecosystems that depend on them. If you harvest seeds from the wild, please make sure to get permission from the landowner, make sure it's allowed if it's on public land, and protect wild plant populations by never overharvesting.

## LARGE-SCALE FIELD APPROACHES

If you are planning a large-scale native wildflower or warm season grass planting, such as those done under Farm Bill cost-share contracts with Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), site preparation is a required component to ensure successful establishment and long-term habitat value. NRCS requires elimination or significant suppression of existing vegetation, particularly invasive species and competitive non-natives, prior to planting. This may be accomplished through a planned sequence of mowing, tillage, prescribed burning, or herbicide treatments consistent with the conservation plan and NRCS guidance. This work is often done the season prior to planting,

and could take an entire growing season or more to remove or control unwanted species. Proper preparation is intended to reduce competition during the critical establishment phase and to create conditions suitable for diverse, nectar- and pollenproducing native species selected for the site's soils, climate, and pollinator objectives. Conservation Cover (Conservation Practice Standard 327, as it's referred to by NRCS), also requires preparation of a firm, weed-free seedbed that allows for shallow seed placement and good seed-to-soil contact while protecting soil structure and preventing erosion. Most native wildflower species are planted at or near the soil surface, so excessive tillage is discouraged. Seeding must follow NRCS-approved timing and rates and use native species mixes that meet pollinator or warm season grass habitat criteria, including bloom diversity and seasonal coverage. Post-planting management, such as establishment-year mowing to control annual weeds and protect developing plants, is required under NRCS. If you are doing your own largescale planting but are not involved with NRCS, following their planting recommendations will still help ensure long term success. For more information on propagating native plants or ethically harvesting seed contact Tania Hanline, Conservation Technician, at (231) 613-4514. For information on NRCS programs, contact Jerry Kass, NRCS Natural Resources Specialist, at (231) 613-4510.

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# Leveraging Local Partnerships for Sustained Conservation Action

## 2025 National Fish and Wildlife Foundation Grant Review

BY: TANIA HANLINE

Conservation Technician

At the time of writing this article, I have been serving as the Conservation Technician for Mason-Lake Conservation District (MLCD) for just over 6 months. I left Arizona on my birthday and started with MLCD one week later. It was a whirlwind return to Michigan after being gone for 4 years and a relief to return to my comfort zone. I am happy to be doing conservation work through our grant project "Leveraging Local Partnerships for Sustained Conservation Action", which is provided by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. With assistance from Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) and district staff, much has been accomplished in the last 6 months. Technical conservation advice and property management recommendations, which we refer to as technical assistance, has been provided to 129 people, including 61 site visits. Seven of those visits resulted in future habitat planting projects that include natural shoreline restoration, filter strip for farm runoff, and pollinator habitat plantings. MLCD staff will be doing most of the plant installation and invasive species management for these projects. I have also completed the design and project proposal (which was approved) for a natural shoreline and native prairie plantings at Pere Marquette Conservation Park Boat Launch. That work will begin in the spring. Several similar projects or landowners are currently in the design and budget phase. Twenty-four of the site visits resulted in the creation of Conservation Plans which help landowners make improvements to their land and protect natural resources in the long-term. Other accomplishments include managing the fall native seed and plant sales. Efforts have been made to support landowners with proper site preparation guidance for seed and plug plantings. This support should help to reduce the number of failed installations, which have been a reoccurring issue in the past. As expected, invasive species are often not dealt with thoroughly by the landowner prior to native plantings.

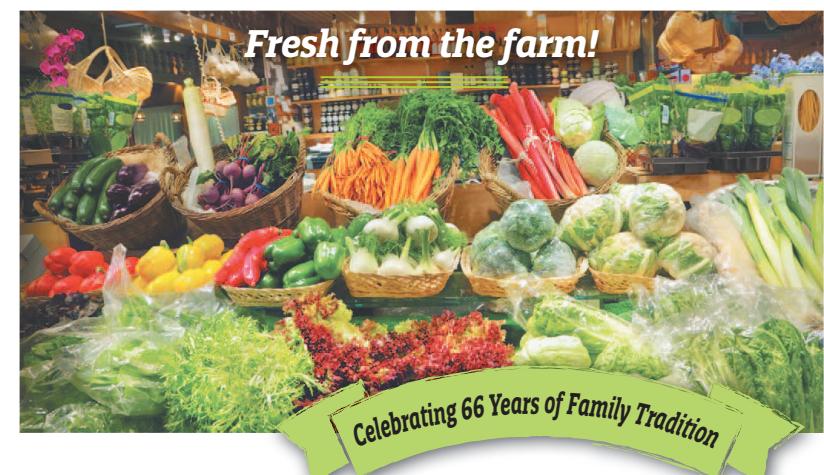
Through technical support and the new invasive species control for-hire program that we offer, we will hopefully see more successful habitat projects and fewer invasive species infestations. In addition to MLCD projects and work I have also been helping NRCS to get caught up certifying conservation practices and helping clients to plan upcoming practices, or conservation activities. Examples include field visits to verify completion of tree and shrub plantings, conservation cover plantings, brush management and forest stand improvement. I have worked with 12 existing NRCS clients and have had 4 new NRCS clients submit applications for assistance. Public outreach and education have been other areas of focus. Educational programs I presented include a nature walk for health (through DHD#10) with kids from Baldwin (28 attendees); a rainwater harvest and rain barrel program at the Baldwin Pure Market (59 people visited and 3 rain barrels were built and given away); West Michigan Old Engine club 5th Grade Field Day (200 attendees) where I helped folks identify trees; Cartier Park Native Plant and Citizen Science Program (20 attendees) where attendees learned plant identification and how to use the SEEK app to collect information for citizen science projects. I've enjoyed sharing these various conservation topics with the public. Finally, it's important to mention that the previous NFWF grant, Accelerating a Holistic Approach to Conservation on Working Lands in Mason and Lake County (MI), ended 4/30/25 with some great accomplishments. Throughout the period of this grant (7/1/25-4/30/25) 76 new Conservation Plans were created. Most clients with Conservation Plans also enrolled in Farm Bill programs such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) or Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), which helped them gain technical support and costshare funding. These Conservation Plans brought 4,444.2 acres "under improved management" or having improved their use of best management practices. The majority of these were

agriculture acreage and the remaining were generally forested. 1,200 acres of cover crops were planted to protect soil health and minimize erosion; precision ag was used on 3,600 acres to hone in on nutrient deficient crop areas and minimize fertilizer application; nearly a mile of windbreaks were planted to minimize wind erosion and control odors or spray drift; and almost 4 miles of livestock fencing was installed to help control livestock rotations and keep them out of environmentally sensitive areas. Pollinator habitat on 17 acres helped build habitat connectivity across our farms. On forested land, there were 47 acres of brush management (usually autumn olive removal), over 10 acres of tree and shrub establishment, and over 130 acres of long-term forest management planning. Through implemented best management practices (BMP's) on 4,547.5 acres there was a reduction of nutrient and sediment load to local



rivers, lakes and streams. Using the StepL model to calculate this impact, 30,206.43lbs. of Nitrogen, 7,919.07lbs. of Phosphorus and 107 tons of sediment was prevented from running off fields and streambanks to our waterways. Over 800 people were also reached through outreach and technical assistance visits. These are just some of the conservation accomplishments that occurred thanks to the NFWF grant being available to fund our Conservation District staff. Whether with County, City and Township Parks, local farms and markets, Health Departments or other local conservation and education groups, it takes strong partnerships to make good conservation work happen. We're so proud of these past accomplishments and look forward to continuing to protect the natural resources in Mason and western Lake Counties.

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# Kick-Starting Water Quality Management in the Lincoln River Watershed: Will you join us?

BY: JULIA PLACE

Project Manager

The Conservation District is excited to begin efforts to better understand and protect one of Mason County's biggest freshwater systems - the Lincoln River. Supported by a Watershed Council grant from the Michigan Department of Environment, Great



Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) Nonpoint Source Program, the "Kick-Starting Water Quality Management in the Lincoln River Watershed" project will help the District and its partners take the first steps towards understanding the impairments and health of the Lincoln River and eventually developing a full watershed management plan - something the Lincoln River watershed has never had before.

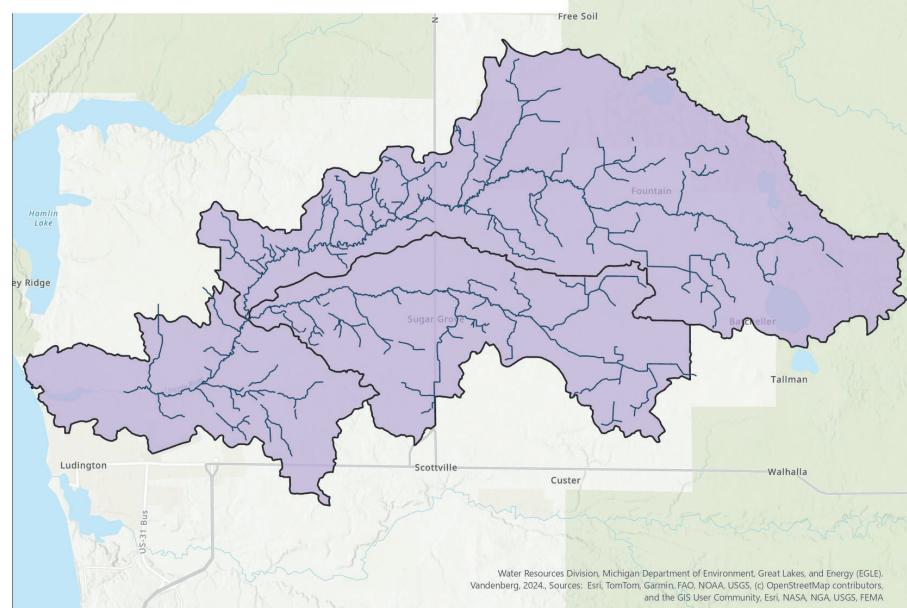
A watershed is the geographic area of land that all drains into one body of water and small watersheds can combine to make larger ones. For example, the Lincoln and Sable Rivers are each small watersheds but, with many others, make up part of a larger Lake Michigan basin. The 101 square mile Lincoln River Watershed stretches from agricultural headwaters in eastern Mason County through Lincoln

Lake (a flooded river mouth) and discharges into Lake Michigan. Fishing, kayaking, and hunting are all community favorites along the waterways. However, past monitoring has shown us that water quality concerns persist throughout the watershed. Elevated bacteria (specifically E. coli) levels in both branches of the river, nutrient-rich conditions in Lincoln Lake, and periodic cyanobacterial blooms along the Lake Michigan shoreline near the outflow suggest that nonpoint sources of pollution may be affecting water quality. Portions of the river have also been observed to have stream-bank erosion issues, which contribute sediment and degrade fish spawning habitats. Despite these issues, there has not yet been a coordinated planning effort to evaluate conditions and prioritize solutions across the entire watershed. Our new project will begin to change that.

Over the next two years, the District will focus on two core objectives: building local interest and gathering data. One of the first tasks will be to begin forming the Lincoln River Watershed Council aimed to consist of a collaborative group of landowners, lake boards, farmers, municipal officials, and others interested in the future of the watershed. Beginning in 2026, MLCD will host two stakeholder meetings to open conversations about water quality concerns, share available information, and identify common goals for the watershed. The District will also provide project updates through newsletters, social media, and community outreach events to keep residents informed and engaged.

While community engagement grows, we will also begin research. The first step will be compiling exist-

## Lincoln River Watershed



ing data from local and state sources to determine where information gaps exist. Using this information, staff will select at least three long-term water quality monitoring sites along the Lincoln River. We will launch monitoring efforts and provide opportunities for volunteers to help us better understand current conditions in the watershed.

Part of this monitoring will include

**We will need the help of the community to learn more of the history of the river, help us locate issues, and be our volunteer power to monitor, restore, and protect the river.**

collecting aquatic insects (macroinvertebrates) using methods provided by MiCorps. MiCorps is a statewide, volunteer monitoring program that helps to monitor water quality by using indicator species of macroinvertebrates to delineate between poor, good and excellent water quality. We have conducted similar surveys with partners on the Little Manistee and Sable Rivers, and invite anyone inter-

ested in volunteering to participate in the spring!

In addition to macroinvertebrates, the District will also complete habitat assessments and collect water chemistry data such as nutrient and E. coli sampling to build a more complete

picture of the watersheds functionality. By combining historical data, new field observations, and community knowledge, MLCD will be able to identify potential problem areas and opportunities for restoration.

Although this project will not resolve every problem in the watershed, it will create the essential foundation for coordinated, science-based action. The Lincoln River Watershed is an important natural resource for Mason County, and its long-term protection will rely on strong partnerships and accessible information. By initiating this now, we will be setting the stage for meaningful improvements in water quality, fish and wildlife habitat, and recreational opportunities for years to come.





## Smooth Sailing through Hazardous Waste Collection Day

**BY: DANI McGARRY**

*Executive Director*

August 16th brought a remarkably calm year for the Household Hazardous Waste Collection Day. The thunderstorms stayed away, the traffic was light, the US-10 construction negligible and the volunteers arrived bright eyed and bushy tailed as always! Thanks to the help of those volunteers, we were able to assist 293 cars, which brought in hazardous materials from 325 households. These numbers are close to recent years, though the amount of materials that was brought in was about 30% lower than in the past.

Our contractors were busy for about a month after the event, processing the chemicals, fertilizers, oil-based paints, cleaning products, batteries, light bulbs, electronics, auto fluids and more that came through on collection day. Some of these items are refined and re-used, broken down for recycling or safely rendered inert for disposal to landfills or incineration. A total of over 13 tons (27,468 pounds) of hazardous materials were safely disposed of in this way. See the side chart for a further breakdown of materials.

Bringing materials to our collection day helps to ensure that these hazardous products do not make it into our soils and waterways, keeping our environment clean for future generations.

A big thank you goes out to our volunteers and the Sheriff's depart-

ment, who put in a total of 152 work hours on the day of the event, to help everything run smoothly! We also need to thank the Mason County Road Commission for allowing us to

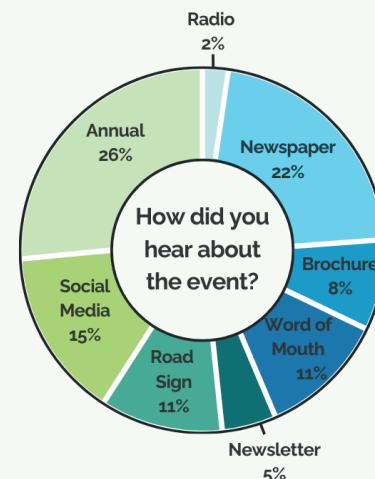
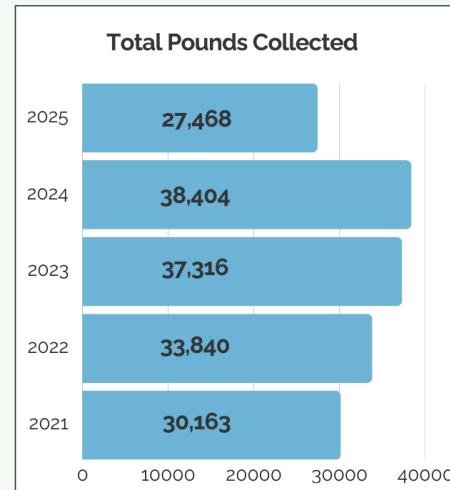
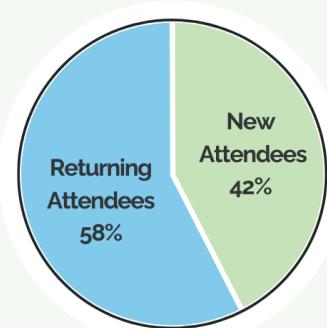
host our event at their site. Financial support from the County, Townships, partners, private donors and our corporate sponsors at OxyChem and West Shore Bank were crucial in helping

us to cover costs this year. Every contribution truly makes a difference in protecting our beautiful community. Thank you for supporting this important event!

### 2025 Household Hazardous Waste Data

**Mason County**

Materials Collected	Pounds Collected
Household Hazardous Waste	8,811
RX & Sharps	276
Pesticides & Other Chemicals	1,543
Oil & Auto Fluids	1,468
Auto Batteries	1,017
Household Batteries	1,239
Electronics & Appliances	9,244
Oil Based Paints	3,870
<b>TOTAL POUNDS</b>	<b>27,468</b>



Township Participation		
	Cars	Households
Amber	18	19
Branch	13	15
Custer	15	15
Eden	6	6
Free Soil	7	8
Grant	14	15
Hamlin	55	64
Logan	3	3
Meade	1	1
Pere Marquette	27	30
Riverton	9	11
Sheridan	10	10
Sherman	8	11
Summit	12	13
Victory	13	15
City of Ludington	60	66
City of Scottville	11	11
Village of Custer	1	1
Village of Fountain	2	3
Village of Free Soil	2	2
Other	6	6

	Total Cars:	293
	Total Households:	325



# Urban Ecology: Supporting Native Habitats and Infrastructure

BY ZACH PEKLO

NCCISMA Program Coordinator

2025 was a productive year for the North Country Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area (NCCISMA) in Mason and Lake Counties, marked by collaborative projects aimed at controlling invasive species and increasing public awareness. Much of the work centered on the City of Ludington, where earlier surveys identified major infestations of Japanese knotweed, Asian bittersweet, and treeofheaven. A key priority was addressing Japanese knotweed. This plant is a particularly aggressive species, similar to bamboo, capable of cracking concrete, damaging foundations and outcompeting native plants along roadsides and waterways. NCCISMA treated 23 infestations, reducing safety risks and protecting roads and buildings.

NCCISMA also partnered with the Ludington Tree Advisory Board to distribute educational materials on these high-priority species. Door hangers and flyers reached all affected properties, encouraging residents to attend a spring workshop on invasive plant control. The workshop provided hands-on guidance and practical strategies for managing invasive plants, empowering local residents to take action on their own properties. Many participants proceeded independently on their properties, while 22 additional landowners received support

through NCCISMA's at-cost treatment program.

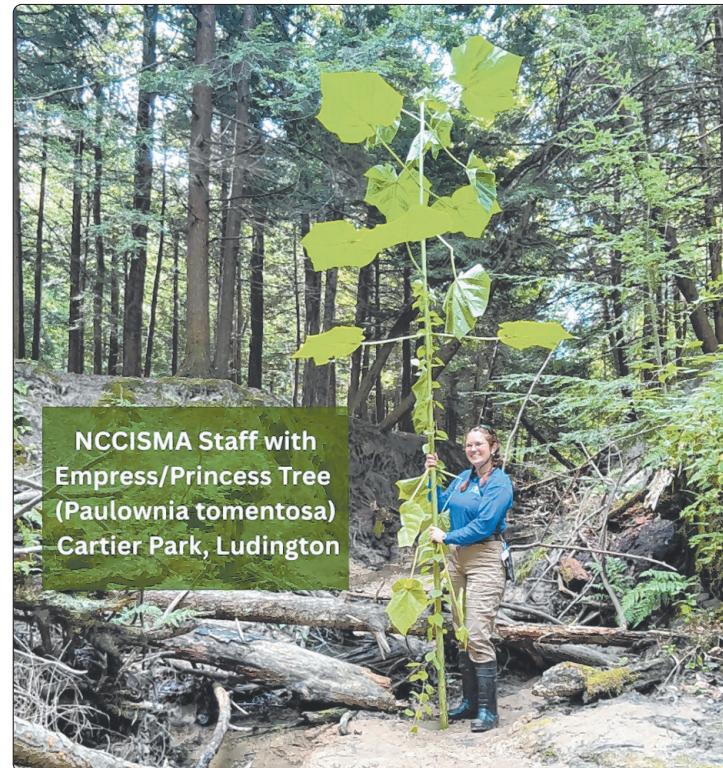
Work extended to public and Association-owned lands as well. With help from AFFEW volunteers, NCCISMA targeted Japanese barberry and mugwort in Cartier Park to improve habitat quality and help restore native plant communities for public enjoyment and ecological health. At Epworth Assembly, treatments focused on restoring coastal dunes and riparian areas impacted by barberry, bittersweet, treeofheaven, and garlic mustard.

Looking ahead to 2026, NCCISMA will launch a replacement program for invasive ornamental shrubs at schools and municipal sites, offering native alternatives and educational signage. More information and details to nominate a site are available at [NorthCountryInvasives.org](http://NorthCountryInvasives.org).

The collaborative projects in Mason and Lake Counties highlight the importance of partnerships, education, and hands-on management in addressing invasive species. By combining city-funded work, volunteer engagement, and at-cost treatment programs, NCCISMA has been able to make meaningful progress in protecting both natural areas and community infrastructure. These efforts not only reduce the immediate threats posed by invasive species but also foster long-term stewardship and awareness among residents, volunteers, and local organizations.



INVASIVE SPECIES treatment workshop held by NCCISMA for Ludington residents



EMILY,  
NCCISMA  
Techni-  
cian, at  
Cartier  
park with  
first ob-  
servance  
of invasive  
Princess  
tree



## MIDWEST FORESTRY, INC.

3636 N. US-31  
Scottville, MI 49454  
**Phone: 231-633-8293**  
**FAX: 231-757-4926**

### Consulting Foresters:

Robert Talsma, Forester  
Tony Papes, Forestry Technician  
Home: 231-464-5577



# Anheuser-Busch

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ENERGY FROM  
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