

2025 ANNUAL REPORT



MONTCALM
CONSERVATION DISTRICT

MONTCALM CONSERVATION DISTRICT



SUPPORT LOCAL AGRICULTURE

Montcalm Conservation District thanks all of our donors for their generous contributions.



MONTCALM
CONSERVATION DISTRICT



Samantha Brady

Bruce Noll Mark & Claudette Sabin Sunni Haglund

Steve Wyckoff Carlson - Arbogast Farm Robert Petersen

Amanda Sturm & Montcalm Area Career Center Agriscience Class

Thank you for joining us this evening as the Montcalm Conservation District celebrates its 77th year in operation at the 2025 Annual Meeting taking place at 6:00 p.m. on Wednesday, December 3rd at VFW Post 5065 Sitts-Halvorsen (209 Washington St. Sheridan, MI 48884).

Evening Itinerary

- Welcome / Introductions
- Dinner – catered by Edgar Farms
- Brief Program Presentations
- Auction with proceeds benefiting MCD's scholarship fund for continued education



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About Us

Conservation Districts were established in 1948 to serve as local units of government dedicated to helping solve the soil and water quality problems seen across the United States.

In 2025, we continue to embody those goals. Our mission is to enhance Montcalm County's natural resources through conservation education, outreach, and partnerships.

District Board of Directors

Chairman	Jed Welder
Vice Chairman	Chris Mark
Treasurer	Doug Weaver II
Director	Steve Wyckoff
Director	Bruce Noll
Associate Director	John Johansen

Staff

Faith Hayes – District Manager
 Lauren Hirschfield – Conservation Program Tech.
 Owen Cousino – District Forester
 Cody Christensen – MAEAP / CTAP Tech.

The Montcalm Conservation District is grateful for the support of the county taxpayers, and the resulting millage funding that has enabled us to enhance and expand our programming.

Thank you for your continued support.
 We look forward to helping you meet your conservation goals.



NEW



Lauren Hirschfield

NEW



Owen Cousino

25



Director Bruce Noll
 25 Years of Service



Events



Fruit Tree Pruning Workshop
March 26, 2025



Native & Invasive Plant Presentation
April 23, 2025



Farm Bureau Project RED
May 20, 2025



Spring Blooms ID Walk
May 29, 2025



FRWC Kayak-A-Thon
June 21, 2025



Reptile & Amphibian Hunt
June 11, 2025



Irrigation Workshop
July 29, 2025



Kindness Rocks Storytime
July 17, 2025



Conservation Trivia
September 9, 2025



MCC Agriculture Field Trip
October 23, 2025



Haunted Forest
October 24, 2025



Brush Management Workshop
October 29, 2025

Comden-Towle Model Forest

The Comden-Towle Model Forest was established as an outdoor laboratory in 1968 to preserve these natural hardwoods, softwoods, native grass prairies, wetlands and pond. With 69 acres, 2 miles of trails, a pavilion and outhouses, the Model Forest is open to the public and encourages safe recreation in adherence to the stated rules and approved activities.

NO HUNTING



In July of 2025, we received a grant supporting woody invasive treatment and updates to the display case, road sign, trail system and trail signage.



Vernal pools discovered!

Vernal pools are naturally occurring, temporary ponds that provide vital habitat to sensitive species (wood frogs, spotted salamanders, fairy shrimp, etc.) and improve nutrient cycling and flood/erosion control.

This land is environmentally verified.



Tree & Native Plant Sales



In 2025, Montcalm Conservation District held a spring and fall Tree & Native Plant Sale to raise district funds and encourage planting natives for conservation via reforestation, windbreaks, wildlife habitat, erosion control, etc. We offered a variety of species and pride ourselves on providing materials at an affordable price.



Why Plant Native?

- Requires less water
- No fertilizers needed
- No pesticides needed
- Reduces erosion & runoff
- Provides wildlife habitat
- Supports biodiversity



Trees Sold
(2025)
22,220

Trees Sold
(since 1948)
12,861,197

Plants Sold
(2025)
1,188

Plants Sold
(since 2022)
3,973



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Invasives

An invasive species is a non-native species whose introduction causes harm to the economy, environment, and / or human health. Invasive species tend to reproduce efficiently, spread quickly and out-compete native species due to the lack of natural predators in the introduced region.

Montcalm Conservation District contracts with the Kent Strike Team to offer cost-share for the treatment of four invasive species:

Japanese Knotweed

Cinnamon Vine

Black Swallow-wort

Japanese Stiltgrass

2025 Stats

88 Total Sites Treated

13 New Sites Treated

40 Total Acres Treated

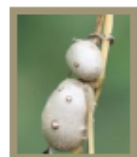
Invasive Species Prevention

- Report invasives
- Plant native
- Don't move firewood
- Stay on designated trails
- Clean vehicle, kayak, boots, etc. after activities



Suzan Campbell, MNFI

Cinnamon Vine: potato-like tubers, indented heart-shaped leaves



Chris Evans (JWAP)



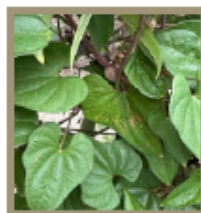
Leslie J. Mehrhoff

Japanese Stiltgrass: alternate leaves, off-center mid-rib mark



Suzan Campbell, MNFI

Japanese Knotweed: bamboo-like stalks, vertical white flowers, averages 3-10ft tall.

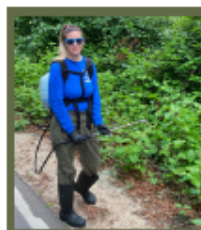


Kent Strike Team

Black Swallow-wort: star-shaped purple flowers, pointed oval leaves, hairy seedpods



Leslie J. Mehrhoff



Sam Brady, Strike Team Lead & Montcalm Coordinator



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Forestry

Our District Forester offers advice and assistance to Montcalm County landowners regarding a variety of forestry topics.

Advises On

- Tree Health
- Native Plantings
- Wildlife Habitat
- Invasive Species Control
- Overall Forest Management

Assists With

- Determining Eligibility for Forest Certification (Qualified Forest Program, American Tree Farm, etc.)
- Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) programs
- Referrals to private consultants and land management companies



*Conservation District foresters do not write management plans, administer timber sales, etc., so as not to compete with private sector foresters.

To schedule a site visit for your property, call 989-831-4212 x 111 or email owen.cousino@macd.org



Owen Cousino, District Forester, & Workshop Attendees

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Owen Cousino, District Forester

Conservation Technical Assistance Program

Michigan Agricultural Environmental Assurance Program – MAEAP
Regenerative Agriculture Program – RAP



2025 Stats

20 Risk Assessments
12 Re-Assessments
5 New Verifications
10 Re-Verifications
143 Risk Reductions

Verification Impacts

4,983 Verified Acres
676 Acres of Cover Crops
700 Acres of Cons. Tillage
891 Acres of No Till
4,099 Acres with Pesticides
4,188 Acres with Fertilizer

MAEAP: supports and recognizes landowners for their voluntary pollution reduction practices under four systems.

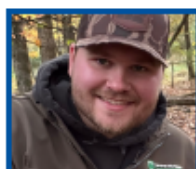
Farmstead Cropping Livestock
Forest, Wetland & Habitat

RAP: provides sustainable farming education with the goal of enhancing soil health for producers.

Maintain Living Roots Integrate Livestock
Maximize Biodiversity Keep Soil Covered
Minimize Soil Disturbance

Nutrient Pollution Prevented

6,158 Tons of Sediment
9,858 lbs of Phosphorous
19,714 lbs of Nitrogen



Cody Christensen, CTAP Technician

For more information, call 989-304-1613
or email cody.christensen@macd.org.



Produce Safety

Produce Safety Technicians help growers navigate produce safety standards, tailor solutions based on their food safety needs, aid in preparing growers for inspections, and assist with food safety plan development. All services provided are available to any & all produce growers and are free, voluntary, confidential, and non-regulatory.



A Produce Safety Risk Assessment (PSRA) is a holistic review of on-farm practices with the technician. After completing the PSRA and any next steps, the farmer can receive a MI On Farm Produce Safety Certificate that comes with MDARD-backed marketing logos, so farmers can advertise and show their customers their commitment to food safety!



2025 Stats

91 Farm Visits
5 Certifications
187 Risk Reduction Practices
26 Educational Presentations
75 Networking Events

Cost share is available! By working with Morgan, you gain access to funding for training, water testing, sinks (wash/pack equipment), and more! Reach out to Morgan if you are interested.



Morgan Anderson
616-223-0027
morgan.anderson@macd.org



Michigan
On-Farm Produce Safety

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NRCS

(Natural Resources Conservation Service)



Born out of the Dust Bowl of the 1930s, NRCS was established to help protect a variety of landscapes from their corresponding natural resource concerns. NRCS provides both technical and financial assistance. Conservation Program Funding is provided through a yearly, competitive application process.

Conservation Programs:

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

A voluntary, conservation program, where NRCS offers financial and technical assistance to farmers and forest landowners to plan and implement conservation practices on working land.

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)

A voluntary, five-year program that provides agricultural and forest producers with financial and technical assistance to increase their baseline conservation level by maintaining current and adopting new conservation practices.

Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)

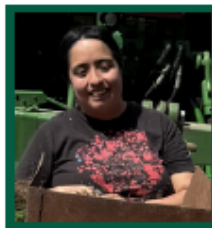
A voluntary program that encourages farmers and landowners to convert cropland into vegetative cover.

NRCS Vision

"A world of clean and abundant water, healthy soils, resilient landscapes, and thriving agricultural communities through voluntary conservation."



District Conservationist
Tamara Buitenwerf



Soil Conservation Tech
Ashley Mata



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2025 Stats

- 44 Active CSP Contracts
- 27 Active EQIP Contracts
- 68 Applications for EQIP & CSP
- 3 CRP Plans Created
- 154 Requests for HEL & Wetland Determinations

989-831-4212 x 104

History of FSA

The origins of the Farm Service Agency began in 1933 during the Great Depression when mounting unemployment and farm failures devastated the United States. In 1995, after numerous reorganizations and name changes, the Farm Service Agency was established as we know it today. Currently, FSA's responsibilities are organized into five areas: Farm Programs, Farm Loans, Commodity Operations, Management and State Operations. The agency continues to provide America's farmers with a strong safety net through the administration of these programs.



2025 Programs:

In 2025, FSA continued to offer loans to help farmers and ranchers get the financing they needed to start, expand or maintain a family farm.

Marketing Assistance Loans (MAL)

A program that provides financing and marketing assistance for specific crops. MALs provide you with interim financing after harvest to help you meet cash flow needs without having to sell your commodities when market prices are typically at harvest-time lows.

Farm Storage Facility Loans (FSFL)

A program that provides low-interest financing to help you build or upgrade storage facilities and purchase (new or used) portable structure, equipment, storage and handling trucks, such as grain bins, hay barns, etc.

FSA Mission

"Equitably serving all farmers, ranchers, and agricultural partners through the delivery of effective, efficient agricultural programs for all Americans."



989-831-4212 x 160

County Executive Director:
Heather Hadder

Program Analysts:
Carrie Albert
Carolyn Waite

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Conservation districts rely heavily on federal, state and other grants to provide funding for project and program implementation. However, these grants tend to have very limited budgets for administration and day-to-day operation costs. Many grants also require local matching funds, making it more difficult to acquire these grants without some form of base funding. Fortunately, Montcalm Conservation District receives funding from a millage shared between Montcalm County MSU-Extension and 4-H. With the state of Michigan providing one of the lowest operational grants for conservation districts, we are incredibly grateful to our county residents for supporting our millage.

The combination of our shared millage, the state's operational grant, a new technical assistance grant and the profit from our Tree and Native Plant Sales, we are able to provide assistance to landowners and address natural resource concerns through watershed conservation, invasive species removal and best management practices for forestry, farming and so much more. These revenue streams are the foundation of our operations and enable us to grow and expand our programming to benefit all residents of Montcalm County.

Financials



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Awards



The Montcalm Conservation District Board of Directors votes for award winners based solely on their accomplishments, as they relate to conservation.

Farmer of the Year – Anonymous

This year's Farmer of the Year will be accepting their award privately, as they have requested to remain anonymous. Still, we would like to thank this individual for their contribution to conservation in the field of agriculture.



Land Steward of the Year – Steve Kellogg

Steve manages 40 acres of land for wildlife habitat. He has replaced many dead trees with wildlife-friendly trees grown on his own land. Most recently, Steve has planted 1.5 acres of monarch butterfly habitat.



Conservation Educator of the Year – Heather Wesp

Heather is an environmental science teacher at Montcalm Community College. She is also a dedicated Flat River Watershed Council partner. In fall of 2025, Heather coordinated a field trip to introduce her environmental science class to traditional Montcalm County agriculture.



25 Years of Service – Director Bruce Noll

Bruce grew up on a farm in Montcalm County and has been operating his own farm since 1968, which became no-till in 1988. In 2019, he was recognized as a Master Farmer. Bruce is also an active member of Ducks Unlimited, Pheasants Forever and Quality Deer Management. For 25 years, Bruce has been an invaluable resource to Montcalm Conservation District, and we are grateful for his service.

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