



# Washtenaw County Conservation District

JUNE 2018

## Celebrating 70 Years of Conservation in Washtenaw

By Megan DeLeeuw

**RESEARCH:**  
*Don Johnson, Washtenaw County Agricultural Agent, and Don Mawer, Conservationist, coordinate research activities during frequent field trips together.*



Photo above part of the 1953 WCCD Annual Report

The Washtenaw County Conservation District (WCCD) turned 70 years old this May. Since its inception, the District has remained a constant presence in our community, working directly with land owners to implement conservation practices that ensure the long term

productivity of their land. Although the WCCD has deep roots in our community, the origin story and context in which it was created often gets forgotten. Examining the historical context in which the WCCD was born may shed new light on the significance of the district

and perhaps where the WCCD may be heading in the next 70 years.

In the late 1920's, Hugh Hammond Bennett, a surveyor for the USDA Bureau of Soils, directly observed the effects of poor soil management and reduced productivity as a result.

Much land being used for agriculture in the Great Plains had once been semi-arid grassland and was being plowed and planted to wheat, destroying prairie grasses that had been established. Bennett was a prolific advocate for soil conservation and instrumental in

### Our Staff and Board Directors

- Matt Koen, Chair
- Jill Dohner, Vice-Chair
- Howard Sias, Treasurer
- Don Rentshler, Director
- Megan DeLeeuw, District Manager
- Nick Machinski, MAEAP technician
- Hannah Bradshaw, Intern

“From every conceivable angle—economic, social, cultural, public health, national defense—conservation of natural resources is an objective on which all should agree.”

-Hugh Hammond Bennett

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## *Celebrating 70 Years of Conservation in Washtenaw County (continued)*

securing federal funds for the creation of the Soil Erosion Service (SES) as part of the National Industrial Recovery Act of 1932. The SES was funded in the beginning of what is now referred to as the Dust Bowl. Widespread drought, crop failure, lack of conservation practices, and persistent winds resulted in clouds of soil particles being spread hundreds of miles, sometimes to the point of darkening the sky. The Soil Conservation Act was signed into law in 1935 in the midst of one such storm over Washington, DC. The Soil Conservation Act built on the SES and officially created the Soil Conservation Service as part of the USDA to address the growing soil loss crisis.

Conservation Districts became a part of the solution in 1937, when the first District was formed in North Carolina. The USDA

made the decision that in order to most effectively ensure long-term solutions, conservation decisions should be made on a case-by case basis directly with land owners. The USDA drafted the Standard State Soil Conservation Districts Law to allow for democratically elected districts to be formed in counties across the country. Conservation districts remain democratically and locally elected to this day, maintaining a strong relationship to land owners in their county.

The WCCD, now one of over 3,000 conservation districts across the Country, was established in May of 1948 by a group of Washtenaw County farmers. At the start, the WCCD worked towards helping farms plan to control erosion, maintain or build-up fertility of the soil and generally conserve soil. Over these 70 years, the District has worked toward these

goals through a diversity of projects and programs: hosted general education events around soil health, organized farm tours, taught in classrooms, developed conservation plans with farmers, hosted a monthly radio program (1951-1956), hosted occasional TV programs, and organized “Soil Stewardship Sunday” at local churches, tree and native plant sales, among other projects.

Over the decades, the priorities of the WCCD have changed as the community and land-use have evolved. Washtenaw County is now a mix of rural, suburban and urban communities, all with unique resource concerns. The exclusive focus on soil health has expanded to include a focus on ground and surface water, land use and development concerns, energy use, solid waste and recycling. The district has continuously updated priorities

through conducting a resources assessment every five years (last completed in 2016).

Looking ahead to the next 70 years, the WCCD will maintain a focus on conserving our local natural resources with balancing the needs of a growing population. If one thing may be gleaned from examining our history, it is that our land and water may not be as healthy today if not for the creation and work of the SES and Conservation Districts. We can only trust that this vital community connection will help us continue to make informed conservation decisions into the future.

Learn more about the soil conservation movement and the history of Conservation Districts on the NRCS website:

[https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/na-national/about/history/?cid=nr143\\_021392](https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/na-national/about/history/?cid=nr143_021392)

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## MACD Working Towards Statewide Conservation Initiatives

By Hannah Bradshaw

On June 4th and 5th, our staff traveled to Bay City for the Michigan Association of Conservation Districts' 2018 Summer Conference. This year we joined 74 Conservation districts from around the state to learn about issues all districts face. Association of Conservation Districts is the statewide association of conservation districts whose mission is "Working to strengthen Michigan's Conservation Districts through leadership, information, and

representation." MACD administrates Michigan's Envirothon, a program that promotes environmental stewardship to high school students statewide. The association also provides training for directors and other district staff, as well as materials on conservation issues, to keep districts up to date on conservation. One of the biggest tasks the Association has however, is that of helping conservation districts solve the issue of limited funding.

With dwindling

funding resources for conservation districts and their partners alike, it is becoming ever more pertinent to work together. As a statewide organization, MACD has the resources to lobby at the state and federal level in a way that each conservation district may not have the resources to do. Though MACD's lobbyists are working hard, they need our help. At the conference, the best advice received on communicating with legislators was to develop a relationship with them

and to let them know that conservation districts exist and are important. While speaking with your representatives, please keep conservation in mind and speak with them about what the conservation district has done for you. You can contact Washtenaw County's State Senators Rebekah Warren (517-373-2406) and John Hune (517-373-2420) and your State House Representatives Donna Lasinski (517-373-0828), Yousef Rabhi (517-373-2577), Ronnie Peterson (517-373-1771), and Adam Zemke (517-373-1792).

## Save the Date! Native Plant Sale Wrap Up

By Hannah Bradshaw

**FALL TREE SALE**  
Saturday,  
**October 13th**  
at the Farm Council Grounds. More details to come in our next newsletter.

*A huge thanks to all those who supported the district and the native plant population of Michigan by purchasing native plants! In an effort to improve our variety and quantities, we will be re-*

*fining our ordering system for 2019. Look out for an earlier deadline in March to ensure that we receive our full order next year! We hope to be able to offer butterfly weed next year by pre-*

*ordering this fall in anticipation for requests next spring. Do you have suggestions for native plant species and improvements for 2019? Contact us at [megan.deleeuw@macd.org](mailto:megan.deleeuw@macd.org).*

# WASHTENAW COUNTY

## Zilke Vegetable Farm Re-verified

By Nick Machinski

Tom and Vicki Zilke grow vegetables without the use of any chemicals or GMOs. They became re-verified in their cropping and farmstead systems in early May, continuing their long commitment to the environment. If you are interested in purchasing any produce from the Zilke's you can find their farm stand off Highway 23 on Carpenter Rd. in Milan. You can also sign up for their Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) and receive a variety of fresh produce whenever you'd like. Just visit their website: [zilke-vegetablefarm.com](http://zilke-vegetablefarm.com) for more details.

## Shanahan Farms Achieves and Re-achieves

By Nick Machinski

Shanahan farms located in Lyndon Township achieved a new verification in Michigan Agricultural Environmental Assurance Program's (MAEAP's) Habitat System in early May. The Shanahan's have nearly 50 acres of wetland and lowland forest which they manage for invasive species. The farm also became re-verified in their cropping system on the same day. Tom, Leann and their son Chris hope to continue to rack-up verifications in the future.

## Baseline Farms Gets Its First Verifications

By Nick Machinski

Located in a secluded little area just south of Baseline Lake, Baseline Farms became verified in their Cropping and Livestock Systems at the end of May. John Cox, is a young farmer raising cattle on rolling pastureland surrounded by woodlands and wetlands. John rotates his cattle every day and has plans for expanding his herd in the near future. You can buy John's Grass-fed beef at Argus Farm Stop or can contact John through his website: [baselinefarm.com](http://baselinefarm.com)

## Fish Day 2018

Fish Day occurred June 2nd at the Farm Council Grounds in partnership with Harrietta Hills Trout Farm. Thanks to all who supported the district by purchasing fish! Total number of fish distributed to ponds this year:

- Rainbow Trout - 180**
- Sunfish - 959**
- Catfish - 325**
- Minnows - 42 GAL**
- Largemouth bass 344**

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## Farmland and Open Space Preservation Boards

By Hannah Bradshaw

Looking for a way to learn more about farm land use and policies in your community? Several townships across Washtenaw County have Farmland and Open Space Preservation Boards. Check out the following meeting times to learn more about land conservation in your Township:

**Ann Arbor Township** Farmland and Open Space Preservation Board meets at 7:30 pm on July 23rd

**Bridgewater Township** FOSP Board meets on June 18th and July 16th at 6:30 pm

**Northfield Township** FOSP Board meets on July 12th

**Scio Township** FOSP Board at 3pm every third Thursday

Does your local township not have a Farm Preservation Board? Ask your townships officials to form one!

## Invasive Species of the Month: Japanese Stiltgrass



For identification tips of many aquatic, terrestrial and other invasive species visit: [www.michigan.gov/invasives/](http://www.michigan.gov/invasives/). At this site you can also find tips on prevention and removal.

### MEMBER CORNER!

Next month's newsletter will include a Member Corner, a place to focus on what you, our readers, are doing in conservation! Please send us your pictures, comments, questions, any other information you find pertinent to conservation and you may be featured in next month's newsletter!

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