



# CONSERVATION UPDATE

*Your Land, Your Water, Your Michigan*

**WINTER 2014**  
Volume 47, Number 1

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*District Conservationist*  
Wilma Bird,  
*Soil Conservationist*  
Tamarra Roseburgh,  
*Soil Conservationist*

## Our Mission

*To educate and assist the people of Washtenaw County with the conservation and management of their natural resources.*

## Web Access

[www.washtenawcd.org](http://www.washtenawcd.org)

*Conservation Update is published annually in December and is available at no charge. To be placed on the mailing list, phone or send a request with complete address to:*

Washtenaw County CD  
7203 Jackson Road  
Ann Arbor MI 48103-9506  
Phone: (734) 761-6721 ext. 5



*A Waste Knot Partner*

## Michigan "After the Glaciers" presentation at 67<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting

Naturalist Dan Farmer will present an interesting and informative program, "After the Glaciers, Life in a Changing Michigan" at the Washtenaw County Conservation District's 67<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting on January 15, 2015.

The program about Michigan's past will emphasize Native American cultures, some discussion of geology, vegetation and wildlife as the climate warmed from glacier to the present day—and the peoples that survived and thrived here. The presentation will also include some interesting artifacts and rocks.

Mr. Farmer has been a naturalist in Michigan for most of the last 35 years with a stint as the Assistant Director of the Central Michigan University Science and Math Center.

He was also an adjunct professor at Wayne State University where he designed and taught graduate level courses on outdoor and hands-on science.

He is interested in almost all topics relating to the natural world, Michigan history and heritage and has given numerous presentations in these areas.

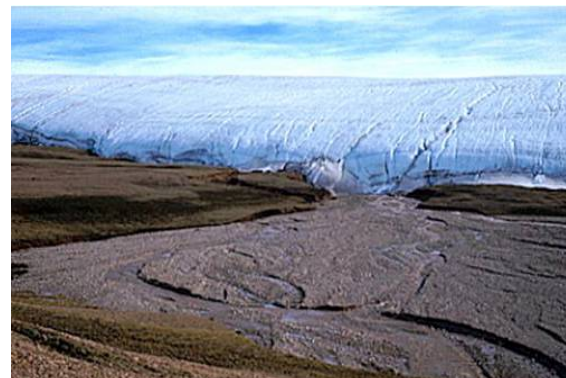
If you like natural and Michigan history, this should be an excellent program, so plan to attend the 2015 Conservation District Annual Meeting.

Call the District Office to make your dinner reservations today!

## Award Presentations

The meeting program will include presentation of the 2014 Conservation Farmer of the Year and Tree Conservationist Awards.

See pages 2 and 3 for more information about the award recipients.



## District Director Election

There will not be a District Director election at the Annual Meeting as no Director positions expire in 2015.

The Annual Meeting  
will be held:

**Thursday,  
January 15, 2015  
6:30 p.m.**

at the Washtenaw County  
Farm Council Grounds  
5055 Ann Arbor-Saline Road

The public is welcome to attend.

A buffet dinner will open the evening.

Cost is \$10.00 for adults and \$5.00 for children 12 and under.

**Reservations for the dinner are needed**, but payment can be made at the door.

**To make your reservations, call the District Office at:**

**(734) 761-6721 ext. 5,  
by January 12, 2015**

# 2014 Conservation Farmer of the Year

The Washtenaw County Conservation District is pleased to present the 2014, “Walter Wolfgang Memorial”, Conservation Farmer of the Year Award to Blumenauer Farms.

Mark Blumenauer with his sons Dan and Mike operate a 2,000 acre cash crop farm in Sharon, Freedom and Bridgewater Townships, growing 850 acres of corn, 750 acres of soybeans, 300 acres of wheat and 120 acres of hay each year. The Blumenauer’s own 370 acres and rent or lease the remaining acres farmed.

Their farm on Bethel Church Road was first bought in 1941 by the family of Mark’s first wife. Then in 1974, Mark purchased the farm from them. With Dan and Mike, two generations work Blumenauer Farms.

In 1985 Mark contacted the Conservation District for assistance with tiling and a no-till alfalfa planting. Soon after, he was looking for help with conservation tillage. In 1988 Mark signed up as a conservation district cooperator.

Also in 1988, the Blumenauer’s began no-tilling, and have been no-till ever since. “We don’t even own a plow”, said Mark. “A number of people wondered what we were doing and thought we were crazy, but many of them are now no-tilling too”, Mark continued.

The Blumenauer’s rotate their crops and use deep ripper and vertical tillage implements to break-up compaction. “You do get compaction on sandy soils, and after using the ripper, the ground is really mellow the following spring”, said Mark.

In addition to no-till, Blumenauer Farms also uses grid soil testing with variable rate fertilizer application; crop rotations; cover crops on hilly and gravel soil fields; maintains a few grassed waterways; constructed an agrichemical handling building through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program; and they use irrigation on about 225 acres.

The agrichemical building has been a great addition to the Blumenauer’s farm operation. It allows them to store all their liquid fertilizer and chemicals inside, along with room to park their tandem-trailer grain hauling semi-truck inside.



*Inside view of the Blumenauer’s agrichemical storage building.*



*Mark Blumenauer (left) ,and son Mike (right). Son Dan not pictured.*

They mix all their chemicals in the field to reduce the risk of well contamination and spills while traveling. And, they haul all their own grain using several semis, dry it, and have on-farm storage for 120,000 bushels.

In the last year, they have moved into precision agriculture. After attending a meeting on the topic, they decided to outfit a planter they were purchasing with precision Ag components for down pressure and auto shut-off, among others.

While they do not have yield results yet to compare with previous years, they were encouraged by the way the new rig worked during planting. In particular, Mark noted a field with variations in soil from muck to gravel hills throughout the field, which was all planted at the same depth with optimum seed spacing by the new planter, resulting in uniform germination and corn height the same across the whole field, which had not been the case in previous years.

The use of irrigation on their sandy soils has shown beneficial yield results for the Blumenauer’s. Although the last two years have generally had adequate moisture, the Blumenauer’s have been able to supplement with irrigation, as needed, which has boosted yields. “We only put on one-half inch of water at a time to keep erosion down”, said Mark. “I would rather put on two applications of one-half inch, then one of an inch in order to reduce the erosion risk. And our corn yields have been 200 bushels or more”, Mark said.

When asked what makes their farm operation successful, Mark said, “a lot of hard work, keeping up on our soil testing and new technology, and working together.” “Just doing it right”, added Mike.

Doing their part to conserve our soil and water resources through good conservation efforts, and an overall stewardship philosophy has helped Mark, Dan and Mike Blumenauer maintain a successful farm operation.

The Conservation District is pleased to recognize Blumenauer Farms as the 2014 Conservation Farmers of the Year.



## 2014 Tree Conservationists



*David (left) and Dave (right) Renner*

To recognize excellent tree planting efforts, the Conservation District is pleased to present the 2014 Tree Conservationist Award to Dave and David Renner of Bridgewater Township.

The senior Dave started planting trees in 1969 when he purchased trees from the first Conservation District tree sale. The trees were planted on his newly acquired Austin Road farm which was purchased in 1967 and had only one hickory tree around the stone farm house which was built in 1836. Today, you can barely see the house from the road.

Dave has kept meticulous records since he first started planting trees, noting the quantity and type of trees, as well as the locations they were planted on the property. He initially started planting just in the spring, then both spring and fall for a time, but the Renner's have found that spring planting works best on their heavy clay soils.



*Dave Renner receives a bundle of trees at the first Conservation District tree sale in 1969.*

The younger David helped his dad plant trees while he was growing up, and continues that tradition today, after buying the farm from his dad in the year 2000. And, David's children have also helped plant trees, so three generations of the Renner family have been involved with tree planting on their farm. "We have planted about 100 trees per year since my dad first started in 1969", said David. Conservatively that would be at least 4,600 trees over the past 46 years.

The Renner's have planted primarily conifers—Austrian and white pines, blue and Norway spruces, and white cedars—but also green ash, black walnuts from nuts and various shrub species.

"We have planted for windbreaks, privacy screens, especially along Austin Road and for wildlife habitat", said David. "All the trees we have planted, except an English oak, were purchased from the Conservation District", he continued.

The Renner's operate a small farm with a few head of cattle, sheep, hogs and chickens, including 11 acres of pasture, 38 acres of hay and a 17 acre woodlot. They also operate, Renner's Corner Early Ford Parts, a small business offering specialty parts and service for the repair and restoration of 1928-1934 Ford automobiles.

Renner's manage their woodlot by removing dead trees for firewood, and planting a few trees here and there. "Unfortunately all the green ash we planted have died from the Emerald ash borer, so I have had to cut down hundreds", said David.



Many of the trees planted by the Renner's have been placed in field fence rows, along woodlot edges, around a small pond, and along Austin Road. The trees have really helped to screen off the road. "Austin Road has become very busy, and there have been many people over the years that miss the curve and run off the road right through our front yard. The trees have helped reduce some of that, maybe by providing a visual barrier", said David.

Even though the Renner's have lost trees to the ash borer, deer, snowmobiles, and normal attrition, David noted that, "we keep planting and replanting trees in the same spots, and keep trying different trees until we find something that does well".

"I planted spruces that just did not want to grow, then tried cedars in the same spot and they really took off", he continued. And, as older conifer trees die or lose lower limbs, David has planted new tree rows to maintain their windbreaks and screens.

The many trees planted around their house and farm have created a picturesque setting for the Renner's. "I think I will always be planting trees", said David.

Because of their consistent, long-term tree planting efforts, and overall stewardship ethic, the Conservation District is pleased to recognize Dave and David Renner with the 2014 Tree Conservationist Award.

# 2014 MAEAP Report

By Chris Coulter & Amy Gilhouse, MAEAP Conservation Technicians

2014 has been a landmark year for the Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP). In October, the program celebrated its 2,500<sup>th</sup> verification statewide; halfway to the five thousand verifications goal. This special occasion was marked by a media event held in Monroe County.

Special guests at the event included Jamie Clover-Adams, Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development director and Wayne H. Wood, Michigan Farm Bureau president.

It was not only exciting to attend the event, but also highly satisfying to witness the result of the agricultural community's dedication to conservation and environmental assurance. This success reinforces the idea that voluntary conservation works—and can create a positive outcome statewide.

MAEAP has also made significant progress in Washtenaw County. We now have 21 farms that are verified in one or more systems, including 7 farms that became verified for the first time in 2014!

New verifications include: Bill and Nancy Sordt of Manchester; Clover Dolce LLC of Manchester; Baker Farms LLC of Clinton; Mill Creek Stock Farm of Chelsea; Jerry Bristle of Manchester; Shanahan Farms of Gregory; and Brian and Cheryl Sweetland of Ann Arbor.

2014 accomplishments in Washtenaw County included:

ITEM	# COMPLETED
Farm*A*Systs	18
Crop*A*Systs	19
Livestock*A*Systs	3
Safe Food*A*Systs	1
MAEAP Farmstead System Verifications	2
MAEAP Cropping System Verifications	8
MAEAP Livestock System Verifications	5
Safe Food*A*Syst Certificates of Completion	1

In addition to working with producers on verifications, the following activities were accomplished:

- MAEAP Presentations at: Soybean Committee Meeting; Washtenaw County Conservation District Annual Meeting; Washtenaw pesticide exam review classes; Washtenaw fall farm field day; and MACD Region 10 meeting.
- Organized and/or Hosted: Three MAEAP phase 1 approved producer meetings co-hosted with Ned Birkey focusing on commercial pesticide applicator license exam review and the MAEAP verification process.

Also demonstrated a groundwater flow model at the April 2014 exam review meeting.

- Meetings attended: WLEB staff meetings; Monroe Farm Bureau farm safety seminar; Jackson sprayer calibration clinic; Washtenaw MMPA meeting; and MAEAP 2,500 verifications media event.



Don Laier of Mill Creek Stock Farm, Chelsea

- Assisted with: well water screening event for nitrates and bacteria in partnership with Eastern Michigan University students and the Lenawee Conservation District; erosion calculation program trainings for WLEB MAEAP technicians.
- Partnered with Legacy Land Conservancy to host a producers meeting in Freedom Township.
- Partnered with Washtenaw Farm Bureau, Washtenaw County Conservation District, NRCS, and the National Fish and Wildlife Federation to host a Sandpiper Boat cruise on the Maumee River with 46 participating. Participants boarded the 65-foot Sandpiper Boat to gain a firsthand look at water quality in the Maumee River, learn more about harmful algae blooms, MAEAP and conservation practices to protect water resources. After cruising on the Maumee participants joined in for lunch at Tony Packo's Original Restaurant in Toledo.
- Promotional, Public Relations Activities: Assisted with fair displays at the Manchester and Saline community fairs.
- Assisted with Conservation District tree and native plant sales.

For more information about MAEAP or how your farm can become MAEAP-verified, contact Chris Coulter by phone at: (734) 761-6721 ext. 101 or e-mail at: [christopher.coulter@mi.nacdnet.net](mailto:christopher.coulter@mi.nacdnet.net).

## 2014 Conservation Highlights

*By Steve Olds, District Conservationist*

Washtenaw County residents have continued to receive conservation planning and other technical assistance provided by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) working in collaboration with the Washtenaw County Conservation District (CD). The result has been just over \$827,522 of 2014 Farm Bill Conservation Program monies being awarded in Washtenaw County for new contracts to address soil, water and other existing resource concerns for qualifying participants.

These monies came through the following federal conservation programs: Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Farm and Ranchland Protection Program (FRPP). In total, 19 new contracts were approved in the county on over 889 acres.

Prior to contracts being selected, applicants had to first have an approved conservation plan developed for their farm by the NRCS and CD planning team. Selections were competitive with factors such as resource protection vs. dollars spent being taken into account.

Some of the main practices contracted included: fueling facilities; agrichemical handling facilities; conservation cover; cover crops; nutrient and pest management; and seasonal high tunnels. The farmstead energy management and comprehensive nutrient management plans were also included in several contracts.

Of note, the fueling facility practice was selected by individuals who were working on obtaining Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP) verification for their farmstead. A special fund code through the EQIP Program was available for those individuals who had two or less practices needed to be verified.

Also new this year was the USDA's EQIP Honey Bee Initiative. This was available to help qualifying individuals establish and improve habitat for honey bees. The conservation cover practice was contracted as part of this Initiative.

The Washtenaw County purchase of development rights programs (PDR) benefited from the federal match dollars utilized through the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP). In all, 4 projects were closed this year from prior applications.

Additionally, 7 new applications were processed by local NRCS staff. This program is locally driven. Local sponsoring entities the NRCS worked with included: Washtenaw County, Legacy Land Conservancy, Salem and Scio Townships.

This past year, has seen some new additions and changes to the NRCS field office team. In June, Anneke Vermeulen served as a Soil Conservationist (Summer Trainee). In August, Wilma Bird assumed her duties as a Soil Conservationist at our field office. Jeff Long (Soil Conservation Technician), left in October to take a promotion with the NRCS, serving as an area level Soil Engineering Technician. Tamarra Roseburgh continues to serve as lead Soil Conservationist at this location.

The NRCS and our valued CD partner are looking forward to meeting your conservation planning and practice application needs for the coming year. For additional information on 2014 Farm Bill Conservation Programs, please visit <http://www.mi.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/>, or call us at (734) 761-8789 extension 3.

## 2014 District Manager Report

*By Dennis Rice, District Manager*

Many of the accomplishments and assistance provided by the District and Natural Resources Conservation Service in fiscal year 2014 are listed in the table on page 6. Below are brief highlights of other accomplishments and efforts undertaken by the District in 2014:

- **Great Lakes Restoration Initiative Western Lake Erie Basin grant:** completed the second year of a two-year grant providing technical assistance through the Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP). The District recently received word that the grant has been renewed for an additional three years. See the MAEAP Report on page 4 for information on 2014 MAEAP accomplishments.
- **Updated County Reporting:** worked with Washtenaw County Water Resources Commissioner Evan Pratt to update the District's County reporting format to provide better reporting of conservation assistance provided to County landowners.
- **Honey Creek Watershed Management Plan:** provided input to the Huron River Watershed Council on development of the Honey Creek watershed management plan.
- **River Raisin Riparian Protection Project (RRRPP):** continued working with the Legacy Land Conservancy on the RRRPP to promote conservation practices and conservation easements in riparian areas of the upper River Raisin watershed.
- **Program Development Committee:** conducted five meetings of a volunteer program development committee that provided valuable input on possible changes to existing District programs, and new efforts to expand District services. Recommendation implementation will follow.
- **Conservation Tour:** District Board of Directors toured several farms to view implemented conservation practices.
- **Fish Day:** 35 orders were placed for 2,494 fish & 47.5 gallons of minnows for pond stocking.
- **Rain Barrel & Composter Sales:** sold 41 rain barrels, 14 composters and 30 barrel risers and downspout diverters.
- **Tree & Plant Sales:** conducted two tree sales and one native plant sale.
- **Maumee River Cruise:** in partnership with the Washtenaw Farm Bureau, conducted a cruise on the Maumee River in Toledo, Ohio for area farmers to see and discuss the algae blooms that severely impacted Lake Erie this past summer. There were 46 participants.
- **Huron River Ag Nutrient Reduction Project:** assisted the Huron River Watershed Council (HRWC) in development of a grant proposal to provide technical assistance, practice funding and educational efforts in the Huron River watershed to reduce nutrients and sediment. The proposal is a partnership between the District, NRCS, HRWC and Washtenaw County Water Resources Commissioner, and would fund a District conservation planner position.
- **Training:** District staff attended several training opportunities, including Michigan Association of Conservation Districts annual and summer conferences.

The Conservation District Board and staff look forward to assisting you with the conservation and management of your natural resources during 2015.



# District and NRCS Assistance Provided in 2014

TECHNICAL & OTHER ASSISTANCE	
General Conservation Assistance Provided	1,219
Forestry & Wildlife Assistance Provided	99
Trees, Plants & other items Distributed & Number of Orders Received	36,708 414
MAEAP Crop *A*Systs Completed & Acres	13 4,495 Ac.
MAEAP Farm & Livestock *A*Systs Completed	10
MAEAP Verifications & Re-verifications Completed	8
Conservation Systems Planned: (# plans / # acres)	22 / 889 Ac.
Forest Management Plans Written	5
Seasonal High Tunnel Systems	10,960 sq.ft.
Wetland Wildlife Habitat Management	42 Ac.
Wildlife Habitat Management	60 Ac.
Financial Assistance Awarded (from all Farm Bill Programs)	\$827,522
TECHNICAL REVIEWS AND/OR APPROVALS	
Public Act 116 & Purchase of Development Rights Applications Reviewed & Acres	8 451.91 Ac.
NRCS Conservation Plans Reviewed & Acres	21 737.7 Ac.
EDUCATIONAL	
Conservation Update Newsletter Issues	1
E-Conservation Update E-mail Issues	12
Educational Materials Distributed	935
Presentations and Demonstrations: (# / # of participants)	10 / 316
News Releases or Radio Public Service Announcements Distributed	20
District Web Site Home Page Visits	31,233

# Financial Statement Washtenaw County Conservation District October 1, 2013 – September 30, 2014

## REVENUES

State Western Lake Erie Basin MAEAP Grant	\$ 60,750
County Appropriation	30,000
Conservation Sales (Trees and native plants; rain barrels and composters; other products and materials)	67,194
Charges for Services	14,985
Interest	124
Other Revenues	1,307
<b>TOTAL REVENUES:</b>	<b>\$174,360</b>

## EXPENDITURES

Operations Expenses (Director & employee expenses; office supplies; bank service charges; postage; petty cash; telephone; web site maintenance; office services; audit; mileage; sales tax; equipment purchases & repairs; products and materials purchased for resale; annual meeting; annual report)	\$ 78,850
Tree & Plant Sales Program Expenses	35,980
Western Lake Erie Basin MAEAP Grant Expenses	60,750
<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURES:</b>	<b>\$175,580</b>
<b>EXCESS OF EXPENDITURES OVER REVENUES</b>	<b>(\$1,220)</b>
<b>BEGINNING FUND BALANCE</b> as of October 1, 2013	<b>\$ 73,510</b>
<b>ENDING FUND BALANCE</b> as of September 30, 2014	<b>\$ 72,290</b>

## RAIN BARRELS & COMPOSTERS

Made from recycled food-grade barrels that have been thoroughly cleaned, then assembled in the USA. Contact the Conservation District office for on-hand availability. If not in stock, products arrive in 2-3 weeks. Pick-up is at the District Office unless notified otherwise. Order forms and more information can be found on the District web site at: <http://washtenawcd.org/ps/rainbarrels.php> and <http://washtenawcd.org/ps/composters.php>.

Your purchases support work by the Washtenaw County Conservation District. Thank you!

### RAIN BARRELS

Collect and store rain water from rooftops for later use to water plants, flowers and gardens.

- 55-gallon capacity, shapes may vary.
- 30-gallon balcony-size barrels also available.
- Colors: black, blue, grey, terra-cotta.
- Aluminum screening on top to keep out leaves, debris & insects.
- Includes front hose shutoff; side fitting to connect multiple barrels; and overflow fitting & cap.
- Designed to remain outside year around.
- Includes installation & use instructions.
- 5-year warranty on materials and workmanship.
- Reduces storm water runoff & pollutants carried to drains & rivers.



### TUMBLING COMPOSTERS



- Perfect where space is limited.
- Only requires a 3 foot by 4 foot area.
- Comes fully assembled.
- Easy to turn—at hip level to reduce back strain.
- Center tube & steel bars to break-up and fluff-up compost for better aeration.
- Low maintenance, nothing to clog.
- Pest-proof, fully-enclosed, off the ground.
- Avoids odor problems by controlling moisture and aeration in excessively dry or rainy areas.
- 5-year warranty on materials & workmanship.
- Includes use instructions