



Helping People Help the Land



Conservation Notes

USDA - Natural Resources Conservation Service - Michigan

September - October 2013

One Dam Down, Two to Go, on Boardman River

The removal of the Brown Bridge Dam on the Boardman River near Traverse City did not go as planned, but if you're a trout, you have to like the final result.

When the 170-acre pond behind the Brown Bridge Dam was being drained prior to the dam removal in October 2012, a breach occurred lowering the pond 14 feet in about 6 hours according to news reports. The breach and subsequent flooding of properties down river was not an auspicious start for a project to remove three dams on the Boardman River. The goal of the project is to restore the river to a more natural state and improve habitat for trout and other cold water aquatic species. That part of the project appears right on target.

The Grand Traverse Conservation District is monitoring water temperatures on the river and found water temperatures below the dam are now lower since the removal. Before the removal water temperatures below the dam could be 9 degrees higher at the hottest times of the year, said D.J. Shook, a fish, wildlife and soil conservationist working for the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians. Water temperatures are now slightly lower below the dam than upstream.

The Grand Traverse Band, NRCS and the Grand Traverse Conservation District are among the more than 30 organizations contributing funding



D.J. Shook and Hank Bailey of the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians Fish and Wildlife Department and NRCS District Conservation Jason Kimbrough stand at the former site of the Brown River Dam on the Boardman River. The dam was removed in October 2012.

and technical resources to the Boardman River restoration project. The Boardman River drains a 282-square-mile watershed that empties into Grand Traverse Bay. The Brown Bridge dam was built around 1922, it and the other dams on the Boardman River planned for removal no longer produce electricity and are a liability for the local governments that own them. The city of Traverse City held public meetings to determine what to do with the dams. The final decision was

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State Conservationist's Message

On the last page of this newsletter is a photo of this year's NRCS American Indian Alaska Native Heritage Month poster.

Michigan had the honor of producing this year's poster to commemorate AIAN Heritage Month this November. The image on the poster is reproduced from an original painting submitted by Michigan artist and Little River Band of Ottawa Indians tribal member Shirley M. Brauker. I had the pleasure of meeting Ms. Brauker and Little River Band Ogema Larry Romanelli at an event to unveil the 2013 poster held at the Little River Band's government center near Manistee. The day also included a demonstration of traditional wild rice harvesting at a nearby location.

NRCS-Michigan has established a strong working relationship with Michigan's 12 federally-recognized American Indian tribes. It took a lot of time and effort by NRCS and the tribes to build this relationship and it has produced many tangible efforts across the state.

Some of the results of the NRCS-tribal partnership are described in this newsletter.

These include the construction of fish passages and the construction of seasonal high tunnels. Other tribal projects, highlighted in past issues of Conservation Notes, include walleye rearing ponds, wild rice plantings and streambank restoration projects.

All of these projects had positive impacts on the environment while also helping the tribes to preserve resources that are culturally important to them. Several of these projects involved conservation activities that were new to NRCS-Michigan. These projects required our staff to acquire new technical skills and our programs staff to make NRCS programs fit the needs of tribal communities. The many NRCS employees

who serve as tribal liaisons or assisted on tribal projects should take great satisfaction for these accomplishments.

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About 165 NRCS-Michigan and conservation district employees attended a series of soil health workshops put on by Ohio State University. Workshops were offered in Clarksville, Owaso and Gaylord



NRCS Michigan State Conservationist Garry Lee



by OSU with funding provided by a Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education grant. The all-day workshops included experts on soil health from OSU, the USDA Agricultural Research Service, the University of Nebraska and Michigan State University. Some topics presented at the workshops included methods for predicting organic matter in soil,

conservation tillage systems and soil health testing among others.

Those who could not attend the workshops have another opportunity to learn about soil health. NRCS soil-health spokesperson, and Conservation Agronomist at the NRCS East National Technology Center, Ray Archuleta is a featured speaker at the Michigan Association of Conservation Districts annual meeting in Big Rapids. Ray will give the meeting's key note address on Thursday, Nov. 7 and will give two other soil health presentations earlier that day. Ray is featured in the NRCS *Soil Health Lessons in a Minute* videos that are posted online.

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Grand Traverse Band & NRCS Partner to Improve Aquatic Habitat

to remove the dams and restore the river to as pristine a condition as possible.

“For me I think it’s awesome we’re bringing it (Boardman River) back as much as we can,” said Hank Bailey, a Grand Traverse Band tribal member and a fish and wildlife technician for the tribe. “We’re making Mother Earth a little healthier, that can’t be a bad thing if you think about it.”

The Boardman now winds its way through area that was once the pond above the dam. The only sign of the pond are the tree stumps that once lined the bottom. NRCS provided funding for the river restoration through the Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative. Through CCPI, dedicated EQIP funds are set aside for projects overseen by the Conservation Resource Alliance Resource Conservation and Development Council. CRA used the funds for critical area plantings to stabilize the area drained by the dam removal. The funds also paid for the installation of wooden structures in the river that improve aquatic habitat.

Although the site above the dam is owned by the city of Traverse City, NRCS is able to provide funding for conservation practices because of the involvement of the tribe, said District Conservationist Jason Kimbrough. The area along the river was seeded on top of snow last April. The river is already developing a gravel bottom after sand and silt from the pond was removed or washed away. The Brown Bridge Dam removal project has restored 1.5 miles of cold-water trout stream and 150 acres of wetland and upland habitat.

Fish Passages

In addition to the Boardman River restoration project, NRCS and the Grand Traverse Band have partnered on numerous projects to improve and expand fish habitat. Federally-recognized American Indian tribes in Michigan are eligible for EQIP and WHIP funds to improve fish passages on streams and rivers. The practice is



Above: The Boardman River winds through an area that was once flooded behind the Brown Bridge Dam, the grassy area was formerly under water. Below: District Conservationist Jason Kimbrough shows a fish passage built on Miller’s Creek in Traverse City to Mark Wilson with the Grand Traverse Band communications department.



available to tribes because it expands habitat and spawning grounds for cold-water aquatic species that are traditionally important.

The Grand Traverse Band has completed 10 fish passage projects on nine streams and one river with NRCS assistance and four more fish passages are planned. The tribe also utilized NRCS financial and technical assistance for channel stabilization, streambank and shoreline protection and critical area planting to improve aquatic habitat.

Tribes Exploring Seasonal High Tunnels



Tesha Zimmerman, an environmental research association with the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians with the first crop produced in the tribe's seasonal high tunnel. (above left) Cindy McIlrath and District Conservationist Pepper Bromelmeier stand next to a seasonal high tunnel recently constructed by the Grand Traverse Band in Antrim County.

Cindy McIlrath walked into the Antrim County Farm Service Agency office looking for information on bees. McIlrath, a teacher for the Grand Traverse Band community education program, was sent down the hall to NRCS to visit District Conservationist Pepper Bromelmeier.

Months later, a seasonal high tunnel is in place near a tract of several tribal houses. It was mostly put up in one day in June by a crew of tribal employees and community members, said McIlrath.

McIlrath has served as a community educator with the Grand Traverse Band for about 8 years, teaching tribal members ranging from children to elders. She has taught a wide variety topics based on what tribal members are interested in. She became interested in food production after attending a workshop at Bay Mills Community College in 2012 and attending the annual Small Farm Conference in Gaylord.

Now that the tunnel is completed, tribal members will grow crops communally both in the tunnel and on the land surrounding it. This year they plan to grow a cover crop and then plant crops in the spring.

"They could have tomatoes in June when no one else does," said Bromelmeier.

The Environmental Department of the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians has operated a seasonal high tunnel for a year. The Sault Tribe's high tunnel also received financial assistance through NRCS. The tribe plans to use the high tunnel for cultivating traditional plants like sweet grass and sage used in cultural practices, said Tesha Zimmerman, an environmental research associate for the tribe.

The tribe erected the high tunnel on land near Sault Ste. Marie that was often used as a dump site. Zimmerman found a lot of glass as well as some "creepy doll parts while working the soil.

Instead of planting ceremonial plants the first year, Zimmerman planted vegetables. Most of the planting was done in June utilizing heritage variety seeds obtained from the Seed Savers Exchange and the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe. Managing water was the biggest challenge among many the first year, said Zimmerman. Water had to be trucked in using barrels which involved a lot of labor. Later, during a wet summer, water runoff collected along the sides of the tunnel killing many of the plants.

Zimmerman plans to put in a system to collect rain water that runs off of the tunnel, solving

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Rose Lake PMC Achieves MAEAP Verification

The Rose Lake Plant Materials Center has joined hundreds of other Michigan farming operations by becoming environmentally verified through the Michigan Agricultural Environmental Assurance Program.

MAEAP is a voluntary program that allows agricultural operations to demonstrate their commitment to environmental responsibility. The program was created by a coalition of commodity groups, governmental, non-profit, and academic organizations.

“For us it was fairly easy since we were already doing what they wanted us to do,” said Rose Lake PMC Manager John Lief.

MAEAP incorporates a recognized set of environmental standards and a network of verifiers coordinated by the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. Through MAEAP, producers can be verified in one or more of Farmstead, Cropping and Livestock systems. In addition to demonstrating environmental responsibility, MAEAP verification also provides some protections under Michigan law in the event of an unintentional discharge or similar event.

The Rose Lake PMC is part of the NRCS Plant Materials Program and is one of 27 plant materials centers across the country. The PMC cultivates and studies plants for use in conservation applications.

The Rose Lake PMC was verified by Earl Krom who serves as the MAEAP verifier for Clinton and Gratiot counties. The biggest item



The Rose Lake Plant Materials Center in East Lansing, part of NRCS, recently became environmentally verified through the Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program. Pictured l-r are Rose Lake PMC staff members Elaine Gerona, Sergio Perez, PMC Manager John Lief and John Durling.

that needed to be addressed at the PMC was secondary containment for a fertilizer tank in the center’s greenhouse. The PMC also added signage for its chemical storage areas and updated its emergency response plan.

The two MAEAP verifications by the Rose Lake PMC helped bring the total number of verifications for the program to 1,872. To learn more about how to become MAEAP verified contact your local conservation district or go to www.maeap.org.

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Michigan Tribes Utilizing Seasonal High Tunnels

both water problems. Collecting runoff should reduce the flooding problem and reduce or eliminate the need to bring water from off site.

McIlrath has a lot of plans for when the Grand Traverse Band high tunnel goes into operation this spring. Community members plan to plant flowers for use by the tribe’s resorts, strawberries which are a popular item at tribal

celebrations, squash, maze, beans and other vegetables. Currently the tribe is working to bring water to the high tunnel site from a nearby well.

No matter what is harvested, it is sure to be a learning experience.

State Incentives Encourage Forest Management

At least two Upper Peninsula residents have their own piece of paradise and the state's Qualified Forest Program will help them keep it that way.

"It's so unique here, an undeveloped parcel is rare," said Ted Tyler of his 40 acres of woods just on the Baraga side of the Marquette-Baraga county line.

Both Tyler, and the owner of an adjoining parcel of woods, Tim Nault, had forest management plans developed for their properties. Having a forest management plan is a requirement for forestland owners to enroll in the state's Qualified Forest Program. QFP allows qualified landowners to execute an affidavit, committing the landowner to keep their property as forestland in exchange for a reduction in the land's property taxes. Nault's property is enrolled in the QFP and Tyler is planning to do the same.

Tyler and Nault received financial assistance from NRCS to hire a certified Technical Service Provider to develop their forest management plans. The Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, which took over administration of QFP from the Michigan Department of Natural Resources in 2013, accepts plans developed by TSPs for enrollment in the program.

There are about 15 TSPs in the Upper Peninsula who develop forest management plans, said Matt Watkeys, forester for the Marquette Conservation District. Watkeys promotes QFP in the county and organized the landowner meeting where Tyler learned about the program. To be enrolled in QFP, landowners must not only have a forest management plan developed but also must follow it, said Watkeys. Scheduled timber harvests are included in the plans and are one of the ways the state hopes to recapture some of the revenue it loses from the program's property tax incentives.

Tyler hired Jim Hammill, a former Michigan DNR wildlife biologist, as the TSP to develop his



Ted Tyler shows an area where selective timber harvesting was completed on his land near the boundary of Baraga and Marquette counties. Tyler has a Qualified Forest Plan for his land which reduce his property taxes along with other benefits (above). Openings where trees were harvested from Tyler's forest land allow light to reach the forest floor providing forage and cover for wildlife (below).



forest management plan.

"He's the most knowledgeable guy I ever had a chance to be in the woods with," said Tyler.

Hammill developed a forest management plan for Tyler that runs through the year 2032. Tyler had a selective timber harvest conducted on his 40-acre plot before having his plan developed. The plan calls for planting white pine among other species and conducting another tree harvest in 15 years.

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Michigan SWCS Meeting Nov. 6

The Michigan Chapter of the Soil and Water Conservation Society will hold its annual meeting and workshop on Nov. 6 at the Holiday Inn in Big Rapids.

The theme of this year's meeting is, Emerging Issues in Soil Health. The featured speakers are James Klang, senior project engineer for Kaiser and Associates and Mark Ludwig who manages a Great Lakes Restoration Initiative project in the Macatawa Watershed.

Workshop topics include a research summary of soil health benefits, expanding the root zone to increase profitability and decrease environmental impacts, and market-based programs for agricultural conservation.

Registration is not required for the morning annual meeting from 11 a.m. to noon but is required for the afternoon workshops. Participants can register for the workshops at the Michigan Association of Conservation Districts [website](#).

For more information about the annual meeting and workshop go to the Michigan Chapter SWCS website at www.miswcs.org/Local_Events.html.



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Incentives Encourage Forest Management

Tyler's neighbors were at first upset when he started logging his property but they changed their minds after seeing the results, he said. Raspberries appeared in the logged areas and Tyler planted food plots to support wildlife.

Nault also harvested trees off of his property after having trees downed after every storm. "Why are we letting this happen," he told himself. His forest management plan calls for planting about 1,500 hemlock trees.

Selectively harvesting timber improves the health of the remaining trees and allows the forest to regenerate where the forest canopy is opened up, said Watkeys.

Tyler lives nearby his property on Lake Michigamme, he uses his enrolled forest land for wildlife habitat and hunting. Nault built a log home on his property and enjoys being in the woods. The woods contain moose, bear, wolves and many other species of wildlife. Nault has photos of many to prove it.

Michigan Qualified Forest Program

The Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development began administering the Qualified Forest Program in 2013.

Landowners can enroll up to 640 acres in the program. Requirements of the program include having a forest management plan developed for the property by a qualified forester. Foresters certified through NRCS as Technical Service Providers are qualified foresters. Landowners can apply for financial assistance from NRCS for having a plan developed.

Landowners interested in QFP should contact their local conservation district or visit the [MDARD QFP Web page](#).

NRCS Bi-Lingual Help Line

Spanish-speaking producers have a new way to access NRCS services in Michigan. A toll-free number (1-855-305-3763) is now in service where Spanish speakers can leave a message and receive a return call from a Spanish-speaking NRCS-Michigan employee.

The toll-free number is also available to English-speaking producers. Customers calling the number will be contacted by NRCS and have their basic questions answered about the services and resources available to them. Callers will also be put in contact with the local NRCS field office serving their area.

Upcoming Events - Upcoming Events - Upcoming Events

November

- 4 American Wind Energy Association State Wind Energy Forum for Michigan, Kellogg Center - East Lansing, For more information go to www.awea.org/Michigan
- 6-8 Michigan Association of Conservation Districts Annual Meeting, Holiday Inn - Big Rapids, for more information go to www.macd.org
- 6 Michigan Chapter Soil and Water Conservation Society Annual Meeting and Workshop, see page 7 for more information
- 8-9 Michigan Farmers Union Convention, Clare, for more information e-mail bthompsonfarm@gmail.com

December

- 3-5 Michigan Farm Bureau Annual Meeting, Amway Grand Plaza - Grand Rapids, For more information go to www.michfb.com/MI/Annual_Meeting/
- 10-12 Great Lakes Fruit, Vegetable and Farm Market Expo, DeVos Place - Grand Rapids, For more information go to www.glexpo.com

American Indian Heritage Month

American Indian and Alaska Native Heritage Month is November. Each year NRCS produces a poster to commemorate the month and NRCS-Michigan was selected to produce the poster for 2013.

Local artists were invited to submit original paintings for the poster and a piece submitted by artist Shirley M. Brauker was selected. Brauker is a member of the Little River Band of Ottawa Indians.

Brauker's painting depicts three women harvesting wild rice. The women wear customary calico clothes adorned with ribbons.



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