

# Conservation Notes

USDA - Natural Resources Conservation Service - Michigan



## Winter 2012

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## Getting Back on the Farm



*Tony Andrejczuk, who relies on a wheelchair, recently started farming again with his brother Ed (right). He is utilizing NRCS programs to improve both his land and accessibility on his farm.*

When he decided to get back into farming five years ago Tony Andrejczuk faced more challenges than most farmers, including not getting stuck out in the field.

“If his vehicle gets stuck, he’s stuck,” said Soil Conservationist Steve Bare. “You and me, we just walk out.”

Getting out of a tractor is a bigger issue for Andrejczuk who lost the use of his legs after a work accident in 1997. Being able to access the entire farm without the fear of getting stuck and having to wait for help to arrive is one of his biggest

obstacles.

“I could tell you a dozen stories about getting stuck in the field, my brother and neighbors are pretty good at getting me out,” said Andrejczuk.

Andrejczuk grew up farming with his father and brother Ed on their orchard and field crop farm near Lawrence in Van Buren County. He studied crops and soil science at Michigan State University with plans to return to the family farm. Unfortunately, when Andrejczuk returned to the farm in the late

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## 2011 Accomplishments and Farewells

The past year was filled with notable accomplishments for NRCS and its conservation partners. During fiscal year 2011, 925 Farm Bill contracts were obligated including over \$27 million in conservation financial assistance to producers.

Last year producers in Michigan contracted to implement nutrient and pest management practices on over 147,000 acres of land. They also contracted to plant more than 43,000 acres of cover crops. By adopting these conservation practices, farmers in Michigan will significantly reduce the amount of sediment, fertilizers and pesticides reaching the Great Lakes and other lakes and rivers.

Each year the agency loses some of its most valuable assets as long-time employees begin their retirement, 2011 was no exception. Fourteen NRCS-Michigan employees retired from the agency. Their expertise and dedication to the conservation mission will be greatly missed.

Two of this year's retirees served as coordinators in the Resource Conservation and Development program. During 2011, NRCS made the decision to no longer provide coordinators for RC&D councils. Michigan's RC&D councils continue to operate and benefit the areas they serve. Former RC&D coordinators, both retired or now working in different positions within NRCS, can take pride in making these councils self-supporting organizations.

- Bruce Walls, Civil Engineering Technician, Caro, retired March 31, 31 years
- James Graham, District Conservationist, Caro, retired May 3, 34 years
- Larry Antoine, Soil Conservation Technician, Marshall, retired May 3, 32 years
- James Hergott, RC&D Coordinator, Bay City, retired July 1, 28 years
- Amalia Gomez, Area Administrative

Coordinator, Grand Rapids, retired Aug. 31, 30 years

- Fred Gasper, Assistant State Conservation Engineer, East Lansing, retired Sept. 2, 33 years

- Jamie Antoniewicz, Soil Scientist, Flint, retired Sept. 30, 22 years

- Robert Baetsen, RC&D Coordinator, Kalamazoo, retired Sept. 30, 33 years

- Diane Pahl, Soil Conservation Technician, Centerville, retired Dec. 2, 33 years

- Vicki Anderson, GLRI Coordinator, East Lansing, retired Dec. 2, 33 years

- Caroline Wade, Civil Engineering Technician, Flint, retired Dec. 31, 42 years

- Frank Cousin, Assistant State Conservation Engineer, East Lansing, retired Dec. 31, 42 years

- Diane Fielder, Human Resources Officer, East Lansing, retired Dec. 31, 41, years

- David Higbee, District Conservationist, Stephenson, retired Dec. 31, 34 years

While State Conservationist Garry Lee is serving a detail at headquarters in Washington, D.C., leadership has been provided by an acting state conservationist.

Gary O'Neill served as acting state conservationist for NRCS-Michigan from October 2011 until the beginning of March. O'Neill now returns to Oklahoma where he serves as assistant state conservationist for operations.



*NRCS Michigan Acting State Conservationist Gary O'Neill*

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## EQIP Practices help with Accessibility Issues

1970s bad market prices forced him to choose a different career. He joined the military and later started a tree business where he suffered his accident.

About five years ago, one of Andrejczuk's sons got interested in farming and he helped him plant a few acres of corn on the farm. They planted some cheap corn seed and planned to leave the corn for wildlife. Instead, a neighbor offered to harvest it for them and paid them for it.

"We had surprisingly good yields for a cobbled-in patch of corn. There was not one straight row in the field," said Andrejczuk.

That initial success was enough to get Andrejczuk back into farming. He is now farming with his brother Ed. His brother lives on the family farm but had stopped field crop farming and was only raising orchard crops. Andrejczuk is working hard to improve soils on the farm utilizing residue management practices and applying manure and other animal-source fertilizers. His enthusiasm for farming is obvious when he talks about his plans for the farm.

Three years ago Andrejczuk took a more active role in the field work. He built his own lift to get on and off the tractor. He can now plant and do other field work but has difficulty getting to some areas of the farm. Areas on the farm where ruts develop are also sources of soil erosion. Andrejczuk used financial assistance

through the NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program to stabilize the areas, reducing erosion and making them passable for farm equipment.

Everything he does on the farm is from a vehicle, whether it's a tractor or a Gator, so accessibility is very important, said Bare. Accessibility issues were also important when Bare helped design an agrichemical handling facility for Andrejczuk. Special care was taken so that he would have room to maneuver a wheel chair around pallets stored in the building. Space was also provided so that he could mix chemicals at floor level, Bare said.

In addition to heavy use area protection and the agrichemical handling facility, Andrejczuk plans to install windbreaks and incorporate additional nutrient and pest management practices with EQIP assistance. In the short time he has been farming yields have increased and he believes he has improved soil quality on the farm.

"I'm extremely happy to be back farming," said Andrejczuk. "I see the farm as where I'm going to retire. Whatever Eddie and I build, we'll leave as a viable entity for someone else in the family to take over." Andrejczuk lives in Lansing where his job was before he got back into farming. Moving back closer to the farm is in his future plans, he said.

## AgrAbility Offers Helping Hand

People with disabilities who work in agriculture can obtain a variety of assistance from Michigan AgrAbility. The organization offers referral services and farm-site assessments to farmers at no cost.

Michigan AgrAbility staff helps farm family members find ways to manage with disabling conditions, such as, arthritis, chronic back pain, motion loss, hearing loss and any other conditions that limit their ability to work on the farm. The organization links with Michigan State University Extension, Easter Seals-Michigan, Michigan Farm Bureau and Michigan Rehab Services to provide practical education and

assistance that promotes independence in agricultural production and rural living.

Michigan AgrAbility cannot pay for equipment, such as lift to access tractors, but it can help the farmer locate the equipment, identify potential sources of financial assistance and can assist with installing and learning how to use it. Peer Network Support Groups are available through AgrAbility to provide forums for farmers who would like to share their experience and seek advice from other farmers with a similar disability.

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## Soils Information? There's an App for That

A new smartphone application is available as a free download for both iPhone and Android users to access soil survey information. The app, SoilWeb, combines on-line soil survey information with the GPS capabilities of smartphones.



The SoilWeb app is a portable version of the UC Davis California Soil Resource Lab's Web-based interface to digital soil survey data from NRCS. Because the app provides soil survey information in a mobile form, it is particularly useful for those working in the field.

Until recently, a disadvantage of Web-based soil survey formats was that user access was limited to desktop computers with an internet connection. That's one reason that NRCS soil scientist Dr. Dylan Beaudette, while still a graduate student at UC Davis, developed the SoilWeb app in

collaboration with NRCS and the UC Davis California Soil Resource Lab.

SoilWeb can retrieve a graphic summary of soil types in response to a user inquiry in the form of soil profile sketches. Each profile sketch shows soil horizons, often compared to a vertical ice cream

sandwich made up of layers of soil. Soil names, locations and taxonomic categories are also shown.

With SoilWeb app, a farmer, rancher, or even a backyard gardener can use a smartphone to gain an understanding of the soil type in the surrounding landscape. SoilWeb is useful even for users already familiar with NRCS's Web Soil Survey, as it is much faster than pulling up soil survey information on a desktop or laptop.

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## Assistance Available for Farmers with Disabilities

Ohio AgrAbility recently produced a series of 15 fact sheets from Ohio State University Extension's Ohio AgrAbility Program.

The publications are designed to provide information and resources to any farmer or agricultural worker who has a disability, injury or illness.

Most of the fact sheets focus on helping farmers prevent injuries, including secondary injury, and how to manage serious conditions such as arthritis or Parkinson's disease, while being able to continue daily farm activities.

The fact sheets are the second in a series of 40 new fact sheets the Ohio AgrAbility Program is planning to produce over the next year. This second set is available for free download at <http://ohioline.osu.edu/lines/farm.html#FSAFE>. They are:

\* "Farming with Lower Extremity Amputation," AEX-981.9-11: Amputations of toes, feet or legs can pose a specific set of limitations to those involved in

agriculture.

\* "Farming with Upper Extremity Limitation/Amputation," AEX-981.10-11: Amputations of fingers, hands or arms can pose a specific set of limitations to those involved in agriculture.

\* "Secondary Injury Prevention: Understanding Concussions," AEX-981.11-11: A focus on mild traumatic brain injuries known as concussions. Includes signs and symptoms of concussions.

\* "Secondary Injury Prevention: Repetitive Motion," AEX-981.12-11: Repetitive motion injuries are linked to type of work conducted, the tools used and the design of the work area.

\* "Injury Prevention: Types of Cold Stress," AEX-981.13-11: Awareness of cold stress injuries associated with completing farm tasks in adverse weather conditions.

### To contact Michigan AgrAbility

Online: [www.michiganagrability.org](http://www.michiganagrability.org)

By telephone: 800/956-4106 (toll-free)

## Conservation District Takes Closer Look at Drains

There may be no better way to learn about water quality issues in a watershed than walking over 80 miles of county drains. That's what staff at the Shiawassee Conservation District did between 2009 and 2011 as part of a study of the Mid-Shiawassee River Watershed.

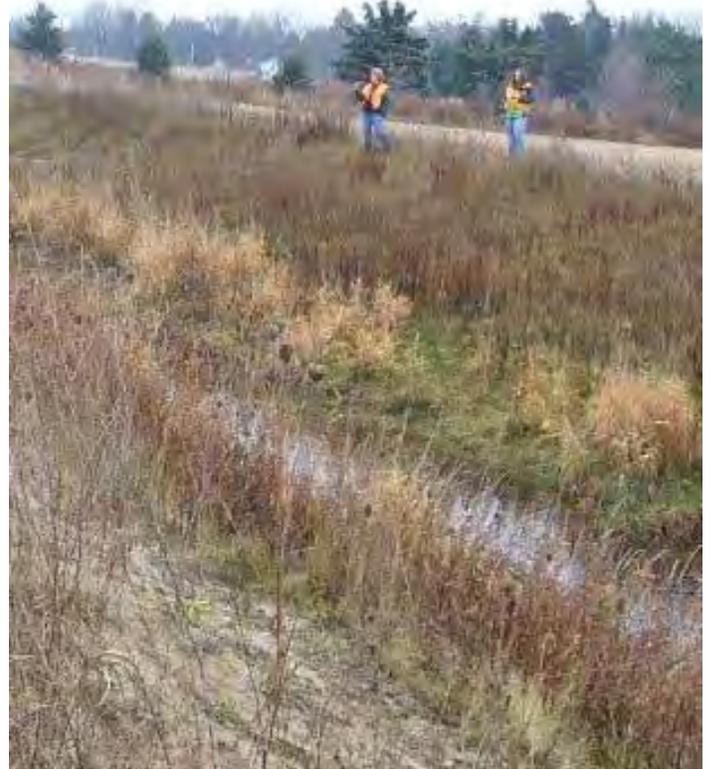
The survey was done as part of a watershed management plan funded through a 319 Clean Water Act grant from the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality. District staff walked county drains, one person would take notes while another usually waded through the drain itself, said Andrea Wendt, the district's watershed technician. The Shiawassee River itself had already been surveyed prior to surveying the drains, said Wendt.

"We knew the problems were upstream and that's where our focus was."

District staff took photos to document what they found and all of the data was compiled into a stream reconnaissance access database with GIS map layers and a photo library. They found a lot of sediment in the drains as well as gulleys, including many that seemed to be created by deer, said Wendt.

If resource concerns were found on the property of landowners that the district was working with, a staff member would bring it to their attention, Wendt said. At the end of the survey, letters were sent to all of the landowners in the survey area. Follow-up calls were made to almost 60 landowners with identified resource concerns. About 15 of those receiving call were very interested in working with the conservation district. Although more than 20 were not interested in the resource concerns on their land, Wendt doesn't remember any being hostile.

The phone calls resulted in 10 site visits by district or NRCS staff and seven applications for Farm Bill conservation programs. The applications included some with the most severe resource concerns observed during the survey. One landowner was initially hesitant but ended up eventually planting a cover crop.



(above) Melissa Higbee (left), executive director of the Shiawassee Conservation District and Donna Kanan, conservation specialist, conduct a stream survey of the Wheeler Drain in the Mid-Shiawassee River Watershed in Fall 2009.

"One major benefit of the survey was that the district staff really got to know the watershed and what's going on out there, good and bad," said Wendt.

Shiawassee Conservation District employees were not able to convince every farmer in the survey to address their resource issues, but they'll keep trying.

# Winter Opportunities for Forest Management

by Bill Cook, MSU Extension

Winter is an optimal time to get out onto your forestlands, prepare for the next spring, and to get some background work completed. Some forestry practices are best done in the winter. For many of us, there is also more time to do some of the things we don't seem to get done during the warmer months.

Property taxes will be on everyone's agenda soon enough. For the forest owner, consider enrollment in one of Michigan's two forest property tax programs. The Commercial Forest Program offers the most tax reduction but requires public foot access for hunting and fishing. The Qualified Forest Property Program has less of a tax break but does not require public access. The latter program may have some changes this year. In either case, do your homework to determine if either program might work for you. Information about each of these property tax programs can be found on the Michigan DNR website.

For forest owners who received income from timber sales in 2011, now is a good time to begin figuring the impact on federal income taxes. The most expensive option is to simply declare the income as ordinary income. The IRS has special regulations for timber sale income that favor the property owner. The National Timber Tax website is an excellent resource for tax-saving advice and current updates [<http://www.timbertax.org>].

Winter is an excellent time to have a forest management plan prepared by a professional forester. These plans yield a variety of benefits. Consulting foresters work with forest owners in nearly every part of the state. There are a couple of government cost-share programs available to help defray expenses of developing a management plan. In some parts of the state, foresters employed by forest industry provide these services.

Many conservation groups also provide certain kinds of information to forest owners.

For forest owners already in possession of a plan, winter might be a good time to review what has been written, consider modifications, update schedules, and figure out what ought to be done in 2012. Investing time in planning makes the activities go much more smoothly during the crunch times.

If tree planting will be part of the warm season, then now is the time to investigate sources of planting stock. Many county conservation districts sell tree seedlings, as do many commercial nurseries that can be found on-line. Hopefully, the site preparation was done this past fall! Especially for large projects, working with a forester is a good idea in order to avoid costly and

disappointing mistakes.

Winter might also be a good time to work on succession planning. What would you like to happen with your forestland after you die? Now is the time to involve family in the process, as well as using the forestland to help bring families together for any number of activities. MSU and others have a few "Ties to the Land" programs scheduled in different locations to help families work through some of these difficult issues. More information can be found on the Internet about this nationwide program.

For those who heat homes with wood, winter is often the best time to buy hardwood cordwood for future years. Winter wood is lower in moisture, so it seasons quicker. It is also harvested when the ground is usually snow covered and frozen. This means less dirt and gravel for the chainsaw to find.

Winter is also a great time to work on tree iden-



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## Black Women Stand Tall in History

During the early European colonization of Africa in the 17th Century, the Portuguese were confronted by a powerful leader, Queen Nzinga.

Queen Nzinga, who ruled in what is now Angola, helped her people defy Portuguese rule until her death in 1663 when she was nearly 80 years old. Not only did she unite her people against the Portuguese, she led warriors in battle and is known as a brilliant military strategist.

Queen Nzinga was one of many important black women in history included in a presentation by Michigan State University Professor Eunice Foster during the USDA's Black History Month Celebration held on Feb. 8 in East Lansing.

Foster's presentation began with Queen Nzinga and included black women in American history including pioneers in agriculture. Foster is something of a pioneer herself. She is a founding member of the National Society for Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources and Related Sciences and served as the organization's first national president.

The event was organized by the USDA Black History Month Committee which included



*Michigan State University Professor Eunice Foster presented a program on black women in world and American history as part of the USDA's Black History Month Celebration held in East Lansing on Feb. 8.*

members from NRCS, the Farm Service Agency, Rural Development, National Agricultural Statistics Service and the Forest Service.

### Black History Month Celebration USDA Video

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## Winter Forest Opportunities

tification. Most of the characteristics are more readily observable, except hardwood leaves, of course. Beginning with the 14 species of conifers will bring rapid confidence. Only 25 species of trees comprise nearly all the volume of the Upper Peninsula forest. This idea would hold true throughout the Lake States, although the species will change a bit from region to region.

If you have Internet ability, the Michigan Forest Pathways website is a reasonably good clearinghouse of many sorts of information that a forest owner may need to access. The URL is [<http://miforestpathways.org>]. Certain conservation districts and MSU Extension offices can also field

forestry queries.

Another excellent source of information for forest owners is the Michigan Forest Association [<http://www.michiganforests.com>]. For a modest fee, members receive regular forest-related information and opportunities to meet and work with other forest owners. The MFA is a collegial organization purposed to assist forest owners.

*Bill Cook is an MSU Extension forester providing educational programming for the Upper Peninsula. His office is located at the MSU Forest Biomass Innovation Center near Escanaba. He can be reached at [cookwi@msu.edu](mailto:cookwi@msu.edu) or 906-786-1575.*

## Campbell Named 2011 "Friend of Conservation"

For her outstanding contributions to the conservation of our natural resources in Michigan, the Michigan Association of Conservation Districts (MACD) recently honored Erin Campbell, Associate Environmental Planner at the Tri-County Regional Planning Commission, with the 2011 Friend of Conservation Award.

This award recognizes an individual, business, organization, or agency outside the association who partners with Conservation Districts to help Michigan citizens conserve their lands and Michigan natural resources.

"Erin is a dedicated leader who brings together organizations, municipalities, and the public to achieve change. She is a great resource in the mid-Michigan area and works tirelessly on water quality projects in the region," commented Andrea Stay, Executive Director of Eaton Conservation District, who nominated Erin for the award. The nomination was supported by Gary Fritz of the Clinton Conservation District.

As the coordinator for the Greater Lansing Committee for Stormwater Management, Erin provides participating Phase II Stormwater (MS4) communities with guidance, outreach, and hosts workshops for continued education. She has created materials such as brochures, news releases and more that are available at [www.mywatersheds.org](http://www.mywatersheds.org) for communities to use for non-point source pollution.

Annually, she organizes the Children's Water Festival at Michigan State University that educates up to 2,200 students on water issues.



*Erin Campbell, associate environmental planner for the Tri-County Regional Planning Commission was honored with the 2011 Friend of Conservation Award by the Michigan Association of Conservation Districts. Pictured (l-r) are Christine Spitzley, Tri-County Regional Planning Commission, Campbell, Andrea Stay - executive director Eaton Conservation District and Mike Lawless, past president of MACD.*

The festival introduces basic concepts of groundwater protection in hopes to positively affect students' MEAP scores, test scores, and overall understanding of groundwater.

In the last several years, Erin has teamed up with the Eaton Conservation District and MSU-Institute of Water Research to secure watershed planning funding for the Middle Grand River and the Red Cedar River Watersheds.

According to Erin, "Working with natural resources (land and water) is an amazing experience

where I feel like I can really make a difference, an improvement and an understanding of the value of our natural resources not only for our health and well-being but for our future generations..."

For her tremendous efforts and for building strong community support for conservation, MACD honored Erin Campbell with the 2011 Friend of Conservation Award at its Convention and Annual Meeting on December 8, 2011, at the Soaring Eagle Casino and Resort in Mt. Pleasant, Michigan.

## Tree Sale Time

Spring tree sale time is upon us. Contact your local conservation district to find order forms and other information.

A listing of local conservation districts and their contact information can be found at the Michigan Association of Conservation Districts website.

**News in Brief - News in Brief - News in Brief - News in Brief**

**Great Lakes Grazing Conference**

Interested producers can learn more about spring forage management during Agriculture and Natural Resources (ANR) Week at MSU. The Great Lakes Forage and Grazing Conference will take place March 7 and 8 at the Kellogg Hotel and Conference Center.

The conference will address forage making and feeding topics as well as grazing information important to dairy, livestock and equine managers. It will also feature a tradeshow, consisting of forage and haymaking suppliers along with distributors of grazing materials and equipment.

For more information go to [www.msue.msu.edu/osceola](http://www.msue.msu.edu/osceola).

**Oakland CD Hosting Public Meeting**

Landowners in the Flint River Watershed in Oakland County are invited to a public meeting on March 6 to address phosphorus and water quality.

The meeting, hosted by the Oakland Conservation District, will begin at 6:45 p.m. at the Holly Public Library in Holly.

The district received grant funds from the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative to work with landowners to reduce the amount of phosphorus entering surface water in the watershed.

Anyone planning to attend the meeting is asked to RSVP by noon on March 6 by calling 248/328-0594. A dessert made of locally grown food will be served.



**ANR Week at MSU**

Agriculture and Natural Resources Week (ANR Week) continues to be one of the largest events of its kind in the nation. Foundations for the week were laid by the Farmers' Institute more than a century ago.



In 1898, Michigan Agricultural College hosted the first state-wide Farmers' Institute "Round-Up." Agriculture Hall was completed in 1909 and a fourth floor auditorium provided the meeting place. Five years later the round-up combined with farm association meetings to become the first "Farmers' Week."

ANR Week 2012 provides a wide variety of topics in areas such as agriculture, horticulture, and natural resources, i.e. Quiet Water Symposium, Michigan Wildflower Conference, Growing of Michigan's Organic Future, MSRBA Rabbit Show, food and nutrition conference: CHOICES and the 84th state convention of the Michigan FFA.

For more information visit: <http://anrweek.canr.msu.edu/>.

**MSU Supports Envirothon**

Michigan State University will award scholarships to the top three finishing teams in the Michigan Envirothon state competition. The 2012 Michigan Envirothon state competition will be held at Lake Superior State University in Sault Ste. Marie from May 9 to 11.

This is the fourth consecutive year that MSU is providing scholarships. Members of the first place team will be awarded \$2,500 scholarships with the second and third place teams receiving \$1,500 and \$500 scholarships respectively.

To learn more about Michigan Envirothon visit [www.michiganenvirothon.org](http://www.michiganenvirothon.org)

# Upcoming Events

## March

- 3 National Invasive Species Awareness Workshop - Central Upper Peninsula Cooperative Weed Management Area, Marquette, for more information call 906/226-2461 ext. 128
- 3-10 Agriculture and Natural Resources Week, Michigan State University - East Lansing, for more information go to page 9
- 6 Flint Watershed Public Meeting sponsored by Oakland Conservation District, 6:45 p.m., Holly Library - Holly, for more information go to page 9
- 7-8 Great Lakes Forage and Grazing Conference, MSU Kellogg Center - East Lansing, more information on page 9
- 9 Newaygo Conservation District Annual Meeting Open House, 2 - 4 p.m., 940 W. Rex Street - Fremont, for more information call 231/924-2420 ext. 5
- 20 Soil Erosion and Sedimentation Control Workshop, Marquette, for more information call 906/226-2461 ext. 128
- 20 Rifle Watershed Technical Committee Meeting, 10 a.m. – noon, Rose City Council Chambers, 410 North Williams Street - Rose City, For more information or to RSVP call Huron Pines at 989/344-0753 ext. 21 or go to [www.huronpines.org](http://www.huronpines.org)
- 20 Creating Wildlife Habitat Workshop, Basement Conference Room, 551 Courthouse Drive - Charlotte, for more information or to register call 517/543-5848 ext. 5 to register
- 29 Mid-Michigan Farm Show 2012, 10 a.m. – 6 p.m., Gladwin Community Arena - Gladwin, for more information go to: <http://mid-michiganfarmshow.com/>
- 31 Caring for Fruit Trees Workshop, Marquette, for more information call 906/226-2461 ext. 128

## March ctd.

- 31 Apple Tree Pruning Workshop, Evergreen Nursery - Rumely, for more information call 906/387-2222

## April

- 14 Tree Health and Native Plants Workshop, Grand Marais, for more information call 906/387-2222
- 20 Calhoun Conservation District 12th Annual Earth Day Festival, Calhoun County Fairgrounds - Marshall, for more information call 269/781-4867 ext. 5

## May

- 4 SWCS Highway Cleanup, volunteers will meet in the NRCS state office parking lot at noon
- 18 Isabella Conservation District Education Day, Chipp-A-Waters Park - Mt. Pleasant, for more information call 989/772-9152 ext. 3
- 22 Rifle Watershed Technical Committee Meeting, 10 a.m. - noon, location TBD, For more information or to RSVP call Huron Pines at 989/344-0753 ext. 21 or go to: [www.huronpines.org](http://www.huronpines.org)
- 25 North Branch Au Sable Road/Stream Crossing (RSX) Tour, 10 a.m. - 12:30 p.m., Oscoda County Road Commission Building - Mio, for more information or to RSVP call Huron Pines at 989/344.0753 ext. 21 or go to: [www.huronpines.org](http://www.huronpines.org)
- 30 Au Sable Big Water Streambank Restoration, 9 a.m. - 2 p.m., location TBD, for more information call Huron Pines at 989/344-0753 ext. 21 or go to: [www.huronpines.org](http://www.huronpines.org)

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