



Conservation Efforts Keep River Pristine

Bob Van Damme’s Delta County farm is as close to a U.P. paradise as you’re likely to find. The farm has two-and-a-half miles of Escanaba River front and two creeks meander through the property. During trout season, Van Damme may see 20 fly fisherman right outside his door.

The farm was established by Van Damme’s grandfather, one of several Belgian immigrants to establish farms in the area. The farm includes 442 acres of forest and 211 acres of cropland. Most of the farms in the area once grew potatoes, Van Damme quit growing potatoes in 2003 and now grows only oats and hay. The value Van Damme places on protecting the natural resources on his farm made him a natural fit for enrollment in the Conservation Stewardship Program.

The EPA stopped by because they were concerned about water quality, said Van Damme. They determined the water was cleaner downstream from my property than before it crossed the farm. “That’s the way I want it to be.”

District Conservationist Tom Tauzer was working with the Van Dammes’ since he came to the Gladstone office in 2007, first with Bob’s father. They have at least 100-foot buffers along the river and the creeks that run through the property, said Tauzer. The farm is environmentally verified through the Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program for both crops and farmstead. Van Damme hopes to add a third MAEAP verification for forestland in the future.



The Escanaba River runs next to Bob Van Damme’s farm in Delta County. He is utilizing the NRCS Conservation Stewardship Program to protect the river and other resources on his land.

CSP provides annual payments based on the conservation measures the producer has in place. Those payments can really help some growers, said Van Damme. There used to be eight potato farms in the St. Nicholas area where he lives, now there are only three still operating. He hopes programs like CSP can help keep the remaining farms going.

In addition to annual payments, CSP provides financial incentives for additional conservation enhancements. Van Damme has incorporated CSP enhancement on his crop and forest land to protect water quality and other resources including wildlife.

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State Conservationist's Message

While the NRCS is a federal agency, within NRCS each state has its own history, customs and traditions. A tradition going back over 10 years in Michigan is the Black History Month program held each February.

Every year a committee of NRCS and other USDA employees organize an event and invite speakers from Michigan and beyond. This year's program was held on Feb. 21, at the Green Stone Farm Credit building in East Lansing. The theme was "The Crisis in Black Education: Breaking Racial Barriers to Equal Education." We were honored to have four distinguished guests as speakers including NRCS Associate Chief for Conservation Leonard Jordan, USDA Director of the Office of Advocacy and Outreach Carolyn Parker, Dr. William Anderson a professor in the MSU College of Osteopathic Medicine and Charles Magee a professor at Florida A&M University.

All four talked about the challenges they faced and overcame during their educational and professional careers. Associate Chief Jordan's father had to drop out of school after the eighth grade but that didn't stop his son from earning a degree and rising to a leadership position with NRCS. As an agency, NRCS can take great pride in the opportunity it provides to all of its employees. The work of the committee that organized this year's event is greatly appreciated.



(above) Dr. William Anderson, civil rights leader and a professor at the MSU College of Osteopathic Medicine, speaks during the NRCS-Michigan Black History Month Presentation held on Feb. 21, in East Lansing.

in Bay City Michigan on May 28, 2014. The first project selections were announced for 2015, and so far there are seven RCPP projects in Michigan, including three multi-state partnerships.

In February, NRCS-Michigan announced the availability of funds for the Tribal Stream and Michigan Fruitbelt Collaborative which was included in RCPP in 2016. This partnership, led by the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians will



*State Conservationist
Garry Lee*

protect water quality in northwest Michigan by improving aquatic organism passages on rivers and creeks and through the purchase of agricultural easements.

This year, two additional Michigan projects were selected for funding through RCPP. They are Lower Grand River Watershed Restoration – Farmland Conservation project, led by the Grand Valley Metro Council, and the Huron River Initiative, led by the

Legacy Land Conservancy. The two projects will protect water quality in the Grand River Watershed in southwest Michigan and the Upper Huron River Watershed in southeast Michigan, respectively.

Michigan partners have come up with effective proposals for RCPP and our state's residents and resources will reap the benefits.

The creation of the Regional Conservation Partnership Program was announced nationally

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The enhancements include improvements on how he applies chemicals. A recent enhancement is splitting his nitrogen applications with 50 percent added after his crops emerge. Other cropping enhancements include a controlled traffic system and continuous cover crops.

To protect wildlife, Van Damme incorporated practices such as leaving a portion of his grain unharvested and taking steps to protect wildlife while harvesting. On his forest land he is diversifying his woods by planting hardwoods and is practicing sustainable management of non-timber forest plants. He also is selective in what trees he harvests. "I never cut cedar, they take too long to grow and are hard to reestablish," said Van Damme. In addition to hardwoods, he has added diversity by planting red pine and European larch. The larch grow fast once they are established, they look similar to pine but their needles change to a rust color in the fall. The deer don't eat the larch but they're candy to porcupines, he said

Van Damme entered into his first 5-year CSP contract in 2010 and renewed it for another five years. Working with NRCS has been a good experience, he said.

"The people at the office couldn't be more helpful. If you have a question you get an answer, you've got to respect that."

Conservation Stewardship Program

The Conservation Stewardship Program is the largest conservation program in the United States when measured by acres enrolled.

CSP helps agricultural producers maintain and improve their existing conservation systems and adopt additional conservation activities to address priority resources concerns.

CSP provides two types of payments through five-year contracts: annual payments for installing new conservation activities and maintaining existing practices; and supplemental payments for adopting a resource-conserving crop rotation.

Producers may be able to renew a contract if they have successfully fulfilled the initial contract and agree to achieve additional conservation objectives. All types of agricultural land are eligible for enrollment including croplands, non-industrial private forestland, grazing land and orchards.



(above) Delta County farmer Bob Van Damme stands next to a memorial dedicated to the Belgian farmers who came to the St. Nichols area in the early 1900s. (below) A variety of conifers and hardwoods grow on Van Damme's property, along with a rotation of hay and grains. The gold-color trees are European Larch.



Belanger Creek Fish Passage is Open

The culvert under McKeese Road used to be an obstacle for fish in Belanger Creek, now a brown trout may pass under the road without even knowing it.

“It was a large project, the biggest stream crossing I’ve been involved with designing,” said NRCS Civil Engineer Andrea Paladino.

The project near Suttons Bay in Leelanau County was completed in the summer of 2015, and involved raising a road, rerouting storm drain and utility lines and replacing two undersized culverts. Rerouting a waterline to 10 feet below the streambed ended up causing delays and added to the difficulty of the project. The culvert is now nearly 20-feet-wide, just short of being considered a bridge, said Paladino. Being the same width as the natural stream the new culvert provides passage for fish and other aquatic organisms.

The velocity of water going through the culvert before the project was too fast for trout to swim through, said District Conservationist Jason Kimbrough. With the flow of water no longer constricted this is no longer a problem.

Paladino completed the design and oversaw construction of the aquatic organism passage portion of this multi phased project, coordinating closely with partners and consultants who were working in the same footprint to implement the road and utility work.

Streambed material was placed in the culvert to imitate the natural pool and riffle features. The material also adds natural streambed roughness, allowing a more natural velocity than would be present when water flows in direct contact with the pipe itself. In addition to the width benefits, the culvert height allows more light into the structure creating additional natural habitat features.

Another improvement to the stream’s health is a rerouted storm drain. Before the project the storm drain emptied directly into the creek inside of the old culvert which deposited road sediment, oil and other debris directly to the creek. The project included a water and sediment control basin to collect storm water, reducing storm water pollution. Stream bank erosion upstream and downstream

from the culvert is also reduced because the flow of water is no longer restricted.

The project was a partnership that included NRCS and the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians as well as numerous government and local partners. A portion of the funding was provided through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program.



(l-r above) District Conservationist Jason Kimbrough, Civil Engineer Andrea Paladino and Soil Conservationist Megan Sebright stand downstream from a fish passage completed in 2015 in Grand Traverse County. (below) The culvert, where Belanger Creek passes under McKeese Road near Suttons Bay, constricted water flow and obstructed passage before the new culvert was constructed.



Fields to the Great Lakes 2017 Events Set

The Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance program and Lenawee Conservation District are hosting shipboard conservation workshops. The workshops educate farmers and partners of agriculture about water quality and how it can be affected by agricultural practices.

In 2017, there are seven workshops scheduled the first taking place on Aug. 11, and the final event on Sept. 14. Two different itineraries are planned, a tall ship cruise on 85-foot wooden schooner Appledore and a trip by ferry to Ohio State University's Stone Laboratory on Gibraltar Island in Lake Erie.

The Water Quality Tall Ship Sail Workshops will be held on the afternoons of Aug. 28 and 29, and an evening cruise on Aug. 30. Workshop participants will sail on Lake Erie while learning about conservation practices that help protect water quality. The trip includes a visit to the National Museum of the Great Lakes in Toledo.

In addition to the Tall Ship Workshops, there are four Western Lake Erie Basin Conservation Day Conferences scheduled for Aug. 11, 22, 24 and Sept. 14. The conferences include a visit to Stone Laboratory on Gibraltar Island in Lake Erie. Stone Laboratory identifies itself as the "oldest freshwater biological field station in the United States and



Participants at a MAEAP-sponsored workshop at Stone Laboratory learn about water quality on one of the lab's research vessels on Lake Erie.

the center of Ohio State University's teaching and research on Lake Erie." Workshop attendees will learn about water quality research at the laboratory and will take a trip on one of the facility's research vessels.

All of the events are free to farmers and partners of agriculture. To learn more and to register for one of the events contact MAEAP technician Amy Gilhouse at 517/263-7400 extension 5578.

Rusty Patched Bumble Bee to be Listed as Endangered

from U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service news release

Just 20 years ago, the rusty patched bumble bee was a common sight, so ordinary that it went almost unnoticed as it moved from flower to flower, collecting nectar and pollen. But the species, now balancing precariously on the brink of extinction, has become the first bee of any kind in the contiguous 48 states to be declared endangered.

The endangered designation is made by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service under the Endangered Species Act for species that are in danger of becoming extinct throughout all or a portion of their range. The listing for the rusty patched bumble bee may be effective by March 21, 2017.

The bee was once common and abundant across 28 states from Connecticut to South Dakota, including Michigan. The rusty patched bumble bee experienced a swift and dramatic decline

since the late 1990s. Abundance of the rusty patched bumble bee has plummeted by 87 percent, leaving small, scattered populations in 13 states and one province.



Causes of the decline in rusty patched bumble bee populations are believed to be loss of habitat; disease and parasites; use of pesticides; climate change; and extremely small population size. Most likely, a combination of these factors led to the bee's decline.

More information about the rusty patched bumble bee, the rule listing it as endangered, and ways to help this species and other pollinators is available at www.fws.gov/midwest/endangered/insects/rpbb/index.html.

Leaders Share Experiences at NRCS Black History Event

Leaders from the USDA and higher education shared their knowledge and experiences with USDA employees at the 2017 Black History Month Program held on Feb. 21.

The theme for this year's event was "The Crisis in Black Education: Breaking Racial Barriers to Equal Education." Keynote speaker Dr. Charles Magee of Florida A&M University presented a history of the Land Grant university system, including the 1890 Land Grant that established several of the nation's historic black colleges and universities.

Dr. William Anderson, who was a civil rights leader in Georgia and is now a professor and advisor in the MSU College of Osteopathic Medicine, talked about the current inequality in the funding of public schools. There cannot be equality in education without equal resources, he told the audience.

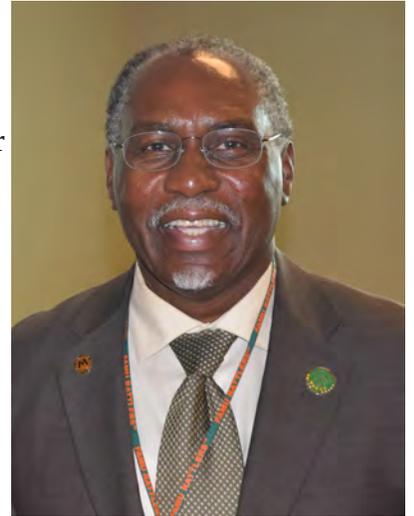
NRCS Associate Chief for Conservation Leonard Jordan talked about his personal history starting out in rural Tennessee. Teachers from his elementary and high school took an interest in him and encouraged him to attend college. His high school teacher even

took him to take his ACT college admissions exam.

Carolyn Parker, Director of the USDA Office of Advocacy and Outreach, talked about the challenges she faced in her career both as an African American and a woman in a field with few female colleagues.

Two NRCS Michigan employees talked about their experience as students at historically black colleges.

The Black History Month program was organized by NRCS employees and was held at Greenstone Farm Services in East Lansing. Michigan USDA employees have organized the event annually for at least 10 years.



Dr. Charles Magee Ph.D.
Professor in the College of Agriculture and Food Sciences at Florida A&M University.

"Don't sit on your abilities."



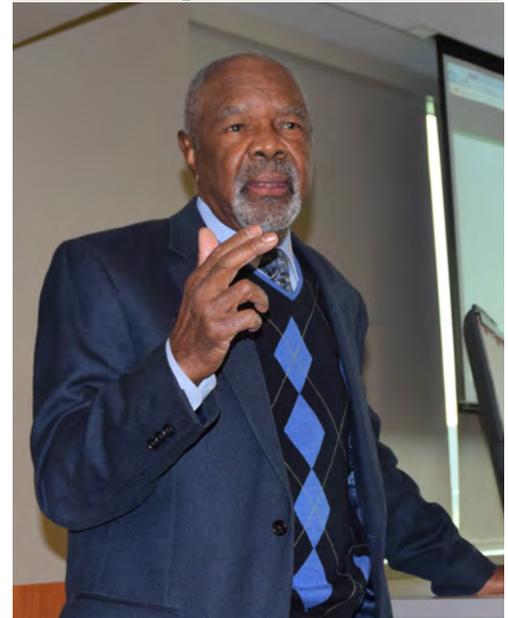
Carolyn Parker
Director of the USDA Office of Advocacy and Outreach

"Have a goal, help someone"



Leonard Jordan
NRCS Associate Chief for Conservation

"Education is the key to open the door."



Dr. William Anderson
Civil Rights leader and Professor of Surgery and Senior Advisor to the Dean of MSU College of Osteopathic Medicine

New Area 2 District Conservationist and Rose Lake PMC Manager

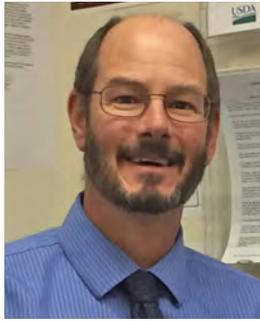
Bill Elder was selected as the new NRCS Area Conservationist for Area 2, which includes the upper tier of counties in the lower peninsula.

Elder oversees 14 field offices, working from the area office in Gaylord. Prior to coming to Michigan, Elder served as state resource conservationist in Nevada. He began his NRCS career as a soil conservationist in New Hampshire in 1988. Elder has also worked for NRCS in New York and Ohio.

Elder was raised in the Boston area but his family moved to New Mexico in the early 1970s. He received a Bachelor's Degree in Environmental Conservation with a minor in Resource Economics from the University of New Hampshire.

Some of the positions Elder has held with NRCS include district conservationist, water quality coordinator and assistant state conservationist for operations. He is also part of the National Employee Development Center training, and National Civil Rights Compliance cadres since 2012.

Bill and his wife, Kelly, have three children, and enjoy camping, skiing, and gardening.



Bill Elder

Christopher Sheahan joins NRCS-Michigan as the new manager of the Rose Lake Plant Materials Center in East Lansing.

Sheahan began his career in the NRCS as an appointee in the Career Intern Program from 2009-2011 at the Brooksville Plant Materials Center in Florida. Following his service in Florida, Sheahan served as a Soil Conservationist at the Cape May PMC in New Jersey from 2011-2016.

Prior to his time at the NRCS, Sheahan worked from 2003-2009 in six different environmental conservation non-profit organizations, served a brief term position with the USDA-ARS, and taught for two years in the Environmental Science Department as an adjunct faculty at Florida International University in Miami.

Sheahan earned his MS degree in Environmental Science from Florida International University in 2006. Outside of work, Chris likes to spend time outdoors with his wife Megan and daughter Zinnia as well as reading, writing, lifting weights, and road cycling. A native of Cleveland Ohio, he looks forward to returning to his Midwestern roots, as well as being closer to family and friends.



Chris Sheahan

Need Trees?

If you're looking to purchase trees or bushes this spring contact your local conservation district.

Most conservation districts offer native trees and bushes for sale at this time of year. Buying trees from your local conservation district ensures that you are purchasing quality, native plants while also supporting conservation efforts in your community. Whether you're planting a windbreak or some ornamental bushes for your yard, your conservation district has the right plants.

Contact information for local conservation districts can be found online at www.macd.org.



Highland Ag Conference Set for March 11

The Highland Ag and Natural Resources Conference will be held on March 11, at Baker College in Cadillac.

A variety of one-hour, concurrent educational sessions are planned with topics on; soil health, new technology, getting started with livestock, timber sales, agronomy and much more. Ag-related vendors and agencies will also be on hand.

Admission to the conference is \$10 for students, \$15 for adults and \$20 for same-day registration. The registration fee includes lunch and refreshments. The conference is organized by MSU Extension in partnership with the Missaukee, Osceola and Wexford County Conservation Districts, and NRCS. For more information and to register go to <https://events.anr.msu.edu>.

Upcoming Events - Upcoming Events - Upcoming Events

March

- 9 Invasive Species in Your Backyard, 6 to 8 p.m., \$5 for county residents, \$10 non-residents, Missaukee Conservation District - Lake City, for more information call 231/839-7193.
- 11 Highland Ag Conference, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., Baker College - Cadillac, for more information and to register online go to <https://events.anr.msu.edu/>
- 13 MSU Southeast Michigan Drainage/Irrigation/Soil Fertility Workshop, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., The Center - Adrian, for more information and to register go to <http://msue.anr.msu.edu>
- 14 Pruning & Fruit/Bramble Care Workshop, 6 p.m., The Country Mill - Charlotte, for more information contact the Eaton Conservation District at 517/543-1512
- 15 Midwest Cover Crop Council Annual Meeting, Crowne Plaza Grand Rapids Airport, for more information and to register go to <https://events.anr.msu.edu/>
- 15 Chippewa County Crop Nutrient Management Program, 6:30 to 8 p.m., Rudyard Township Hall - Rudyard, for more information and to register go to <http://msue.anr.msu.edu/events>
- 16 Christmas Tree Production Workshop, 6 to 8 p.m., \$5 for county residents, \$10 non-residents, Missaukee Conservation District - Lake City, for more information call 231/839-7193
- 16 Soil Health Strategies, 11 a.m. to 2 p.m., Calder's Dairy - Carleton, go to www.monroecd.org/events.html for more information and to register
- 22 Wildlife Workshop - Monarch Mansions & Bee's Bungalows, 6 to 8 p.m., L.L. Johnson Lumber - Charlotte, for more information contact the Eaton Conservation District at 517/543-1512
- 23 How Clean is Your Stream, 6 to 8 p.m., \$5 for county residents, \$10 non-residents, Missaukee Conservation District - Lake City, for more information call 231/839-7193
- 25 Mid-Michigan Farm & Garden Show, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Gladwin Community Arena, for more information go to farmandgardenshow.com

March ctd.

- 29 Semi-Annual Farmer-Led Watershed Conservation Meeting, 11:30 a.m. to 2 p.m., LISD Tech Center - Adrian, for more information go to www.waterqualityfarming.org
- 30 Composting & Vermiculture, 6 to 8 p.m., \$5 for county residents, \$10 non-residents, Missaukee Conservation District - Lake City, for more information call 231/839-7193
- 31 Controlling Invasive Species with Herbicide, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., Calvin College Bunker Interpretive Center - Grand Rapids, for more information go to www.kentconservation.org

April

- 6 Are You the Perfect Host?, 6 to 8 p.m., \$5 for county residents, \$10 non-residents, Missaukee Conservation District - Lake City, for more information call 231/839-7193
- 8 Fruit Tress & Grafting Workshop, TBA, \$5 for county residents, \$10 non-residents, Missaukee Conservation District - Lake City, for more information call 231/839-7193
- 13 Tree for Bees, 6 to 8 p.m., \$5 for county residents, \$10 non-residents, Missaukee Conservation District - Lake City, for more information call 231/839-7193
- 19 Transforming your Property with Native Plants, 6 to 8 p.m., Albertus Hall, Aquinas College - Grand Rapids, for more information go to www.kentconservation.org
- 29 Ingham Stream Team Monitoring, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., Ingham Conservation District - Mason, for more information and to register go to www.inghamconservation.com

May

- 8 Clean Boats Clean Water Training, 11:30 a.m. to 3 p.m., Ingham Conservation District - Mason, for more information and to register go to www.inghamconservation.com
- 9 Pizza and Garlic Mustard Pull, 4:30 p.m., Ingham Conservation District - Mason, for more information and to register go to www.inghamconservation.com

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