



Helping People Help the Land

Conservation Notes

USDA - Natural Resources Conservation Service - Michigan

January/February 2018

Stewardship has its Rewards

Conservation has many rewards, especially so if you are enrolled in the USDA's Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) like Clare County farmer Ken Brown.

Brown had the Kitty Kurtis Ranch, 1,560-acre cow-calf operation, MAEAP verified for Livestock, Farmstead and Cropping systems back in the program's early days in 2005. Enrolling the farm in CSP, which provides annual payments based on an operation's level of conservation, was the next logical step.

Kitty Kurtis Ranch was once the property of Henry Ford and was purchased by Brown's grandfather Curtis Brown in 1959. Brown, who served on the Clare Conservation District Board for 25 years, has been making conservation improvements on the ranch for decades. The windbreak that was planted 35 years ago now keeps snow from drifting over the road. Over the years Brown has protected streams on the property by constructing stream crossings and fencing to protect the streambanks from his grazing cattle. Brown utilized another USDA conservation program, the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, to offset the cost of many of the practices he implemented.

"CSP in my mind, you should already have (conservation) practices implemented prior to enrolling," said Brown.

Even though Brown was already practicing good land stewardship practices, both MAEAP verification and CSP have made him up his game even more. He needed to install a new fuel storage system for the MAEAP farmstead system. The record keeping required for the Cropping System MAEAP verification prepared him for the requirements of



Ken and Pat Brown own and operate the 1,560-acre Kitty Kurtis Ranch in Clare County.

enrolling in CSP.

CSP provides annual payments for the level of conservation achieved by an operation as well as financial assistance for adopting additional conservation enhancements. Some of the enhancements Brown has implemented include planting pollinator habitat, splitting his nitrogen applications, placing hay feeding areas on areas with low fertility soils and reducing pesticide drift

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State Conservationist's Message

With the first application cut-off for EQIP in the fiscal year 2018 now past us, there's still time to take a look at what was accomplished in 2017.

Last year NRCS-Michigan obligated over \$24 million in conservation financial assistance through EQIP and an additional \$4.7 million in EQIP assistance was obligated through Regional Conservation Partnership Program projects. These funds will be used to put conservation practices on over 118,000 acres. EQIP conservation practices are field proven to provide conservation benefits such as improving water quality, reducing soil erosion, improving wildlife habitat and improving air quality to name a few. Increasingly, EQIP funds are being targeted to address local, regional and national natural resource concerns.

The largest share of Michigan's EQIP funding, 32 percent, went to initiatives that address our state's conservation priorities. These include livestock management systems, high tunnels for producers in Genesee and Wayne counties, and assistance for farmers to become verified through the Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program. An additional 8 percent of Michigan's allocated EQIP funds went to beginning and socially disadvantaged farmers.

Both EQIP and EQIP-RCPP financial assistance exceeded what was obligated in fiscal year 2016. Michigan obligated over \$17.0 million in EQIP during 2016 and an additional \$2.4 million through RCPP. RCPP keeps expanding with Michigan organizations submitting successful RCPP proposals each year. The number of

counties receiving EQIP funding through RCPP increased from 14 in fiscal year 2016, to 26 last year.



State Conservationist
Garry Lee

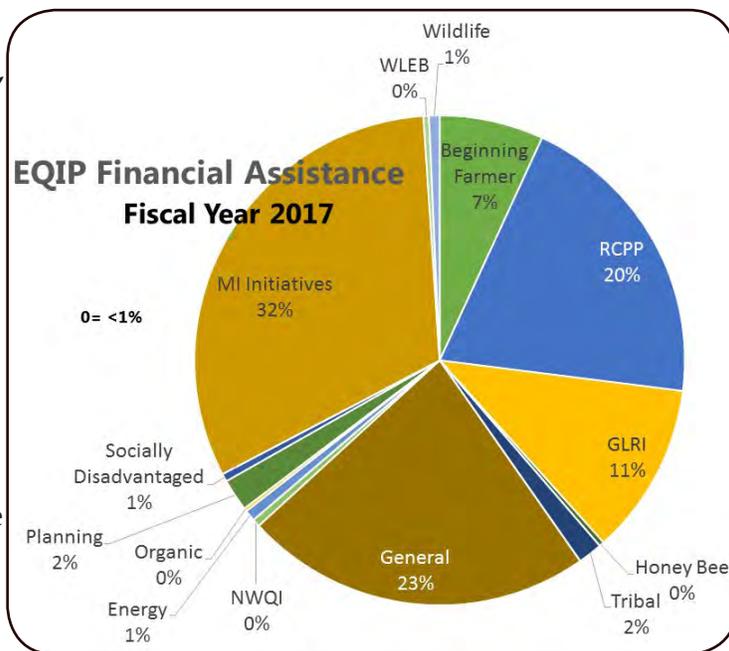
One of the goals of Agriculture Secretary Perdue is to make the USDA more user friendly for our customers. Recently he announced the creation of a new website, Farmers.gov. The site combines the three agencies making up the Farm Production and Conservation (FPAC) mission area within USDA. FPAC includes NRCS, the Farm Service Agency and the Risk Management Agency. The

new site is intended to provide producers all of the information they need about the USDA agencies that serve them at one location.

Conservation Client Gateway was also created to make accessing USDA services more convenient for producers by eliminating the need to travel to a USDA Service Center. Client Gateway allows producers to request services and manage their active NRCS

conservation contracts online.

The number of Michigan users utilizing Client Gateway to access NRCS services online continues to grow. As of Feb. 14, over 300 producers are using Client Gateway compared to 249 at the end of September 2017. Both producers and NRCS staff have found using the system to be a good experience that saves time.



Q&A with Owners of MAEAP-Verified Laetus Pullus Farm

submitted by the Shiawassee Conservation District

We visited with Richard and Katy Stone from Laetus Pullus Farm to learn more about their farm and recent MAEAP verifications. They are a great example of how MAEAP can fit and benefit any size and type of farm.

Briefly describe your operation: We moved to our home in Perry and started Laetus Pullus Farm (Latin for Happy Chicken) in 2009. We dreamed of owning chickens and having a large family garden. In 2010 we bought our first laying hens and about 2 dozen market chickens. Fast forward to 2016, we now raise 45 laying hens for egg sales. We also raise 60 to 100 turkeys for Thanksgiving and 650 market chickens all on pasture, and have a large garden that supplies fresh produce for the family as well as excess for sale. We are new to farming and have no farming experience. We have learned from other farmers, online research, reading books and networking.

Why is MAEAP important to you? MAEAP is important to us because we want to be good



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stewards of the land as well as learn the best practices for our farm. We wanted to be certified to show our customers that we have accountability for our practices. It has been a great learning experience on learning all the environmental practices. We

did not have to make many changes to become certified. We just had to add a better record keeping system for the chicken litter, and add a spill kit and a fire extinguisher to our barn.

What do you perceive as the benefits to MAEAP? We feel that being MAEAP Verified is an added bonus to our

farm because it shows our customers that we are preventing agriculture pollution and being proactive in protecting the environment. The nice big sign and the being able to use the logo on our social media and website we felt is a huge bonus too. It leads to good conversation with our customers too. Not everyone understands what MAEAP is.

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Stewardship has its Rewards

using drift reducing nozzles on his spray equipment. Brown has noticed an improvement in the soils where the hay feeding areas were located. The amount of organic matter has improved, he said.

Farmers enroll in CSP through 5-year contracts. Brown is now on his second CSP contract and has found the program worthwhile. There is a list of eligible enhancements to choose from and the program allows different options for implementing them, said Brown. The program requires initiative and good record keeping but the payments and conservation benefits justify the effort, he said.

There aren't a lot of operations like his cattle ranch in Michigan, said Brown, but CSP and MAEAP have been a good fit. The recognition of his conservation efforts through MAEAP and the financial resources provided by CSP are good incentives but not the most important ones for Brown.

"Wanting to be a better steward and protect the environment," is the most important incentive, says Brown.



The Kitty Kurtis Ranch is a 200-cow, cow-calf operation in Clare County.

-photo provided by Kitty Kurtis Ranch

Partnership Makes Conservation Planning a Priority

A partnership including NRCS is taking a back to basics approach to getting conservation on the ground. The National Conservation Planning Partnership was launched in 2015 to reinvigorate conservation planning.

“One of the objectives of the partnership is to improve our capacity to deliver, technically sound, one-on-one conservation planning assistance,” said Shiawassee Conservation District Executive Director Melissa Higbee. One of the priorities of the partnership is to establish a clear path to becoming a certified conservation planner. Higbee has served on the Partnership’s Communication and Messaging committee since the partnership was organized. She represents the National Conservation District Employees Association, one of five organizations forming the partnership along with NRCS, the National Association of State Conservation Agencies (NASCA), the National Association of Conservation Districts and the National Association of Resource Conservation and Development Councils.

The NCPP will create training opportunities for state, conservation district and NRCS employees along with training materials and promotional materials for conservation planning. “Through this

effort we will work collectively on conservation planning instead of separately,” said Andrea Stay with the Environmental Stewardship Division at the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. Stay has worked on the committee since 2016, representing NASCA.

One product of the partnership is a 20-page “Conservation Planning” publication that is available for download on the National NRCS Conservation Planning web page. The booklet explains the goals of the partnership as well as the history, principles and importance of conservation planning for farmers and ranchers and forest owners.

The Partnership sent emails to field staff with information about the partnership and notices of webinars and other educational opportunities.

The training of conservation planners is the partnership’s main goal. The partnership will create online and field-based training courses and a structure with requirements for trainees to become apprentice planners, certified planners and master conservation planners. The ultimate goal is to serve producers by building a workforce of technically-skilled conservation planners.



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Q&A with Owners of MAEAP-Verified Laetus Pullus Farm

What are your plans for the high tunnel? This past year we applied for and received an EQIP grant for a High Tunnel and for Pollinator Cover Crops. The plans for the high tunnel is to grow vegetables and sell right from the farm like we do our chickens and eggs. We have been talking with a grocery store about selling our products to them as well. The cover crop will cover the portion of the field that is not being used for the pastured chickens and turkeys.

Contact the Shiawassee Conservation District at (989) 723-8263 ext 3 to see how MAEAP can work on your farm too.

(right) Richard and Katy Stone, owners of Laetus Pullus Farm in Perry, with their daughters.



Managing Forests for Wildlife

by Bill Cook, Michigan State University Extension

One of the more common objectives heard from forest owners is creating a better wildlife habitat. It is definitely a worthy goal, but determining exactly what the forest owner might mean can be difficult. After all, any sort of habitat is good for somebody. Even a big parking lot can be great feeding grounds if you are a ring-billed gull looking for cast-off French fries.

The term wildlife habitat consists of two words that can be defined in almost innumerable ways, many of which are simple platitudes.

What is wildlife? Does it include ticks, spiders, mosquitoes and black flies? Maybe not. What about salamanders, darters or cowbirds? Wolves? Maybe wildlife is a euphemism for deer, turkey and ducks. A forest owner must decide.

There are over 550 vertebrate species that maintain residence or visit in Michigan and most of them are at least partially dependent upon forests. Every species has variable requirements for activities such as food, shelter, water, nesting, raising young, display, loafing, escape and roosting. These needs might vary by the season. Then there is also migration, either short-distance or long-distance, to consider. Species have different range sizes that can vary with age, gender and habitat quality. Given all the potential combinations, the concept of habitat explodes.

What is habitat? This is a simple question, but it can generate a complex answer. Forest types are numerous with dozens of descriptive features such as tree composition, size, height, longevity and tolerance of shade. In addition, forests are constantly changing, meaning that habitat conditions evolve over time. The playing field is dynamic where the rules change.

Then there are the human perceptions of good versus bad. Sometimes, these perceptions have little to do with habitat quality characteristics. Good management practices might include such potentially objectionable practices such as tree cutting, burning and herbicide use. Such practices

frequently generate different human responses.

Some people tend to believe that if the woods look good, then it must be a good habitat. Visual quality is an exceptionally poor measure of habitat quality majority of the time. Human perceptions of good and bad are not necessarily in sync with what various species of wildlife might require from their habitat.

Given the number of wildlife species and the possible combinations of habitat functions, the number of suitable habitats becomes almost infinite. Frankly, wildlife science does not know the full set of requirements for every species because there is a lot to discover. Whitetail deer are, perhaps, the most studied species on the planet, yet research continues to be well funded. However, how much do we really know about coots, racers and voles?

Most large private forest owners and most public agencies, manage woodlands to provide a wide range of conditions such as age, height, density and species mix. The idea is that with a smorgasbord of conditions, all wildlife will find a place. This approach has worked reasonably well over time even when knowing there are some exceptions to this broad idea. There are some stunningly successful wildlife comeback stories.

So, with this universe of species numbers, habitat conditions and various levels of knowledge, what should a forest owner do?

First, a person should think about which species of wildlife they wish to have on their property. Who is there already? Who is not? What can be done with the forest to enhance desired future conditions? What are those desired future conditions? Is the ownership large enough to affect a meaningful change? What are the implications when looking through the lens of a landscape context?

A person may want to consider hiring a consulting wildlife biologist, although there are not too many of these professionals. Sometimes, a forester can



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District Tree Sales

Whether you're planning a windbreak or creating wildlife habitat in your yard this spring, check out your local conservation district's spring tree sale.

Michigan's local conservation districts have a variety of trees, shrubs and native plants for sale. Native plants provide habitat for birds, pollinators and other wildlife along with another conservation benefit.



Proceeds of tree sales are an important source of funding for local conservation districts. Districts are taking orders now for pick up in the spring. For more information call your conservation district or visit their [website](#).

NRCS Earth Team



NRCS Soil Conservationist Maureen Stine (Onaway Field Office) helps children paint lead-free sinkers at Shivarree on Black Lake. The event held on Feb. 2 and 3, marks the beginning of Sturgeon fishing season on Black Lake.

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Managing Forests for Wildlife

help, but usually their expertise lies in suggesting practices to achieve certain woodland conditions with the large presumption that those conditions will meet the forest owner's habitat goals.

For many, if not most woodland owners, the goal is more deer. The home range for deer usually exceed that of most ownerships so habitat changes can have only a limited impact. Although, the conditions on November 15 might be the sole determining factor. In this way, both foresters and wildlifers can help along with many special interest groups such as Quality Deer Management Associations.

You also have to consider if deer management is equivalent to wildlife management. Is a woodland managed exclusively for more deer an example of good forest management? After all, science has shown that deer overabundance causes ecological havoc. It might be much easier to think in terms of a single species or a related suite of species, but is that good management? Many owners do not care as long as they believe there are more deer or larger racks. However, others will argue that any single species focus lacks the robust quality that they might use to define good habitat or good management practices. This opinion can include an exclusive focus on particular endangered species and popular game species. Oftentimes, single species

management comes at a cost to habitat diversity and other goods and services that a property might be able to produce. Taken to an extreme, if food for ring-billed gulls were critical objectives, we could justify paving thousands of acres of woodlands and wetlands.

Of course, any wooded property, even an abused woodland, has more habitat diversity than a farm field or manicured lawn. Therefore, benign neglect might have some advantages, as well as a large clearcut that allows trees to regenerate. A red pine plantation can also add to landscape diversity even though the individual stand might have inherently low species diversity during much of its life cycle.

Wildlife, habitat and management are wonderfully complex sets of ideas and practices. Woodland owners that actively work their property learn much and gain high levels of satisfaction. Those not fortunate enough to possess their own woodlands can have similar experiences by learning more about what happens on public ownerships such as state or federal forests. There is plenty of room in the arena for almost everyone.

This article was published by Michigan State University Extension. For more information, visit <http://www.msue.msu.edu>.

African Americans in Times of War Theme of BHM Event

A Colonel serving in the Michigan Army National Guard and the president of the Tuskegee Airmen National Museum in Detroit were the featured speakers at the annual NRCS Black History Month Event.

The theme for this year's event was African Americans in Times of War, and was held on Feb. 27, at GreenStone Farm Credit Services in East Lansing. African Americans have served in every U.S. war since the Revolution, Colonel Lavetta Bennett told USDA employees.

Bennett highlighted some of the prominent history of African American serving in the military including the famed 54th Massachusetts Infantry of the civil war, the Buffalo soldiers who served in the American West, the Harlem Hellfighters who fought as part of the French Army during World War I and the Tuskegee Airmen of World War II.

Bennett also spoke about the challenges facing returning combat veterans when they return to civilian life. "They have endured a lot, war is hard on anybody, no matter what race or religion, anybody."

Dr. Brian Smith, who flew his own plane from Detroit to Lansing for the event, spoke about the famous Tuskegee Airmen who flew fighter planes for the U.S. Army Air Corps during World War II. Black pilots had to fight both the Germans and racism during World War II, he said.

Many military leaders at the time did not believe African Americans were capable of serving as pilots, Smith said. It took pressure from the NAACP and Eleanor Roosevelt to convince the president to allow blacks to become pilots.

Even after blacks were accepted into pilot training, segregation and discrimination were prevalent in the military, said Smith. Coleman Young, the late mayor of Detroit, led a sit-down strike at an Air Corps base in Indiana after black pilots were not allowed in an officers' club.

When the Tuskegee Airmen were allowed to fly in combat they distinguished themselves while escorting bombers in Europe. They flew 200 missions without allowing a bomber to be shot down.

Retired from his career as an engineer for General Dynamics, Smith devotes much of time to preserving the history of the Tuskegee Airmen and promoting

aviation through the Tuskegee Airmen National Museum. This includes annual flying performances with the Tuskegee Airmen during Detroit's River Days.

In addition to preserving the history of the Tuskegee Airmen, the museum also

has several programs to promote flying and other aviation careers to young people in the Detroit Area. For more information visit the [Tuskegee Airmen National Museum website](#).

(top photo) Dr. Brian R. Smith, president of the Tuskegee Airmen National Museum in Detroit speaks to attendees at the annual NRCS Black History Month Event held on Feb. 27, in East Lansing. (above) Colonel Lavetta Bennett of the Michigan Army National Guard and her husband Martin Bennett who is a retired military veteran.



Upcoming Events - Upcoming Events - Upcoming Events - Upcoming Events

March

- 8 Oceana Asparagus Day, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., New Era Reformed Church - New Era, call 231/873-2129 or go to msue.anr.msu.edu/events for more information
- 13 Planting Workshop, 5:30 to 7:30 p.m., Boardman River Nature Center - Traverse City, for more information or to register, contact Kama Ross at 231/256-9783, or kama.ross@macd.org
- 13 Irrigation and Drainage Update, 8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m., Dundee Village Office - Dundee, for more information or to register call 517/264-5300 or go to <https://events.anr.msu.edu/event>
- 13 Agriculture for Tomorrow Conference, 9:15 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., Bay de Noc Community College - Escanaba, for more information call 906/387-2530 or go to msue.anr.msu.edu/events/
- 14 Planting Workshop, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m., Government Center Community Room - Suttons Bay, for more information or to register, contact Kama Ross at 231/256-9783, or kama.ross@macd.org
- 14 Learn to Prune Fruit Trees, 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., Saginaw Valley Extension Center - Frankenmuth, for more information and to register call the Tuscola Conservation District at 989/673-8174 ext. 3
- 15 Introduction to Composting and Compost Tumbler Workshop, 6 to 9 p.m., Missaukee Conservation District - Lake City, for more information and to register call 231.839.7193 or visit www.missaukeecd.org
- 16 West Central Spring Horticulture Meeting, 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m., Hart United Methodist Church - Hart, for more information call Oceana MSU Extension at 231-873-2129 or go to <https://events.anr.msu.edu/>
- 20 Planting Workshop, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m., Homestead Township Hall - Honor, for more information or to register, contact Kama Ross at 231/256-9783, or kama.ross@macd.org
- 20 Helping Farmers Thrive - Soil Health Seminar, 9 a.m. to noon, SW Michigan Extension Center - Benton Harbor, for more information contact the Berrien Conservation District at 269/471-9111 ext. 3

March ctd.

- 21 Forest Mushrooms, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m., Leelanau County - Suttons Bay, \$10/person, contact Kama Ross at 231/256-9783, or kama.ross@macd.org
- 21 Soil Health Workshop, 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., Jonesville Fire Station - Jonesville, for more information contact the Hillsdale Conservation District at 517/849-9890 ext. 3 or hillsdalecd@macd.org
- 22 Kent Conservation District Showcase, 6 to 8 p.m., Grand Rapids Township Hall - Grand Rapids, for more information and to RSVP call 616/222-5801
- 23 Invasive Species and Herbicide Use, 9:30 a.m. to 3 p.m., \$30/person, Calvin College Bunker Interpretive Center - Grand Rapids, for more information go to <http://kentconservation.org/>
- 24 Wildlife Habitat Workshop, 9 a.m. to 1:30 p.m., Shiawassee Conservation Association - Owosso, contact the Shiawassee Conservation District by March 16 to attend at 989/723-8263 ext. 3
- 29 Farming for the Future III, 9 a.m. to 1:30 p.m., Owosso Charter Township Hall - Owosso, contact the Shiawassee Conservation District by March 16 to attend at 989/723-8263 ext. 3
- 29 Wildlife Habitat Workshop, 7 to 9 p.m., Coldwater Township Hall - Coldwater, for more information call the Branch CD at 517/278-2725 ext. 5, or go to www.Branchcd.org

April

- 11 Transforming your Yard with Native Plants, 6 p.m., Aquinas College, Room 119 - Grand Rapids, \$10/person, for more information and to RSVP call 616/222-5801 or email jessie.schulte@macd.org
- 11 Michigan Shoreland Stewards Program Workshop, 5:30 to 7:30 p.m., Coldwater Lake Association Building - Cold Water, for more information call the Branch CD at 517/278-2725 ext. 5, or go to www.Branchcd.org



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