



Conservation Notes

USDA - Natural Resources Conservation Service - Michigan

July/August 2015

Invasive Plants Hard to Get Rid Of

Some visitors are well mannered, they keep their belongings in their suitcase and don't disrupt your home. Other visitors spread out everywhere and create chaos, this is how invasive plants behave.

"Invasive plants by definition are not beneficial. They can unravel the fabric of the plant and animal communities in natural areas," said NRCS State Biologist Dan Zay.

Autumn olive is an invasive species frequently encountered in Michigan. The plant, native to Asia, was promoted after the Dust Bowl for planting in hedgerows, said Zay. Like other invasive plants, it will colonize areas where there is little or no competition.

In Mecosta County, native forests were harvested and many of the farms that followed became idle due to low soil fertility. These farms are now colonized by autumn olive or other invasive plants like spotted knapweed, a visitor from Europe. When Kevin Courtney purchased his farm in Mecosta County in 2003 it had been idle for about 6 years and autumn olive had taken over the non-wooded portions of his 162 acres.

"It took 3 years of very hard work to control the autumn olive," said Courtney. "The problem with autumn olive is that a 6-foot-diameter bush may have 8 or 9 different plants, if you don't kill them all, it will come back."

Through cutting and using herbicides, Courtney was able to remove most of the existing autumn



Mecosta County landowner Pam Gilbert (above) is removing autumn olive plants but is hoping the pine trees she planted will eventually shade them out.

olive on his property. His next step was to keep the plant from coming back.

"Once you clean a field you have to put the field in use. If you clean a field and ignore it, it will come back."

The most effective way to keep autumn olive from returning was to put the fields in hay production, said Courtney. He still mows marginal areas with a brush hog once or twice a

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State Conservationist's Message

Michigan farmers and forest owners don't have to travel far to learn about new innovations in conservation and the resources available to them. Thanks to Michigan's conservation partners, agricultural field days, demonstrations, conferences and workshops are taking place all over the state.

Local conservation districts, Michigan State University Extension, Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, the USDA and many other organizations are partnering to provide information on a wide variety of topics. Events were held throughout the summer and are continuing through the late summer and fall. These events include workshops on building and operating seasonal high tunnels for local food production, innovative ways to include cover crops in cropping systems, updates on the latest research in nutrient management and soil health and even the use of drones in agricultural research.

Local events are valuable as farmers can see how conservation practices are utilized on farms like their own. Hearing your neighbors talk about their trials and errors in using cover crops and conservation tillage is just as useful as hearing about the latest research. Producers willing to experiment with new resource-conserving farming methods and then share their experience with their neighbors are performing a great service to the agricultural community and the community at large.

Farmers and forest owners in Michigan are fortunate to have resource professionals in their areas as well as some of the world's leading researchers at our state's universities. This is one of the reasons that Michigan has such a diverse and innovative agricultural sector. Let's keep up the good work!



A conservation field day event in Shiawassee County.

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In late May, the USDA launched the Conservation Client Gateway, which provides producers the ability to apply for conservation assistance and to review and sign their NRCS contracts and practice schedules online. We encourage producers to go online and give this system a try.



*State Conservationist
Garry Lee*

Assistance with utilizing the new Conservation Client Gateway system is available online and at your local USDA Service Center.

The system is intended to give our customers 24/7 access to their program records and the ability to track payments and document completed practices. Using Client Gateway is optional and doesn't prevent a producer from also obtaining services directly at their local NRCS field office.

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There was a strong response to Michigan's first conservation planning sign-up, held during late May and early June. NRCS received over 700 applications for conservation planning. Farmers and forest owners who applied for a conservation plan will have one completed in 2015. Conservation planning is intended to help producers better utilize NRCS conservation programs to address their most important resource concerns. Completing a conservation plan does not obligate a landowner to enroll in conservation programs, it will give the landowner a better idea of what resource concerns are present on his or her land.

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Invasive Plants Hard to Get Rid Of

year to control autumn olive.

Landowners with invasive plant problems may be able to receive financial assistance from NRCS. If a conservation plan developed with NRCS identifies invasive plants as a resource concern, financial assistance is available, said State Resource Conservation Betsy Dierberger. Brush management, herbaceous weed control and integrated pest management are practices eligible for financial assistance through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program.

The brush management practice, for examples, allows for repeated applications which can include chemical or mechanical options or even planning for a prescribed burn, said Dierberger. Assistance is available on associated agricultural land in addition to fields, pasture and forest land. EQIP assistance is also available for re-establishing healthy pasture or trees on land where invasive plants are removed. EQIP practices such as tree and shrub establishment and pasture and grazing systems can be utilized to prevent invasive plants from coming back. Healthy pastures and woodlots are better able to compete with invasive plants, said Dierberger.

Pam Gilbert is another Mecosta County landowner battling autumn olive. Her farm had been used for grazing dairy and beef cattle until 1992. When the livestock operation stopped, autumn olive began taking over the former pasture and hayfield areas. Gilbert hired someone to remove the autumn olive with a back hoe and in 2010 she planted pine trees.

"My hope is the trees can outgrow the autumn olive, and I think they will," said Gilbert.

Chris Harrington has been building up the soil on his farm so that his pasture and forage can compete better against spotted knapweed.

"People have gone away from manure, it used to be everyone had animals to maintain fertility, said Harrington.

Harrington bought a farm in Mecosta County to provide pasture and forage for his beef cattle



Spotted knapweed (above) can establish itself in conditions with poor soil quality and little competition.

operation. Nothing had been done with the land for several years before he bought it and knapweed was well established. Through a combination of spraying herbicides, grazing, planting cover crops and applying manure, he has restored soil fertility enough that his forage crops can out compete the knapweed.

Before applying manures nothing seemed to establish, said Harrison. One of his hay fields was producing less than a ton an acre. He experimented with different cover crops as well as applying chicken and turkey manure. Utilizing test plots, he discovered a combination of peas and oats grew best. Technical assistance from Michigan State University Extension and NRCS was helpful, he said.

"From my observation it's weed-fee out there," said Harrington. "It's taken awhile."

Lake Michigan Peninsulas Important to Monarch Migration



Wetland easements, including this easement on the Garden Peninsula in Delta County (above left), provide valuable habitat for a wide variety of plants, animals and aquatic life. Milkweed plants on the easement are an important food source for monarch caterpillars (above right).

During their southward migration to Mexico, monarch butterflies are known to congregate on peninsulas, like the Garden Peninsula in Delta County, before they cross large bodies of water.

Since 1996, researchers have tracked monarchs migrating through the Stonington Peninsula, which is on the other side of Big Bay De Noc from the Garden Peninsula. Researchers there found **no evidence of a long-term decline** in monarch numbers in contrast to reports of declines in Mexico.

NRCS staff monitoring a wetland easement on the Garden Peninsula found monarch caterpillars feeding on milkweed plants. Common milkweed is the essential host plant for the caterpillar. Common milkweed doesn't grow in wet conditions but can be found on the periphery of wetlands, said NRCS State Biologist Dan Zay.

Conservation plantings on uplands can include common milkweed, such as on Conservation

Reserve Program or pollinator plantings, said Zay.

NRCS partnered with the Xerces Society to help make seed for native milkweed more available. The effort involved the NRCS Plant Materials Program teaming with native seed suppliers primarily in southern states.

Monarchs from the Midwest **overwinter** in mountain areas in Mexico from October through March. The monarchs travel south during one generation but it takes three to four generations for the butterflies to return north.

Learn More About Monarchs

[Migration and Overwintering - USDA Forest Service](#)

[Population Trends of Monarchs at a Northern Monitoring Site: Analyses of 19 Years of Fall Migration Counts at Peninsula Point, MI](#)

[Project Milkweed](#)

Soil Health Series Highlights Cover Crops

A demonstration of planting cover crops into standing soybeans was the highlight of a soil health field day sponsored by the the Osceola-Lake Conservation District.

The event was held at the Thornton Farm near Reed City on July 2. Jack Thornton began planting cover crops into his standing corn and soybean crops as a way to establish a more diverse cover crop mix than was possible by planting after the fall harvest. He uses a no-till planter after finding it to be more effective than broadcast seeding.

The conservation district is hosting four field days as part of its Soil Health Summer Series. **Two more field days** are planned this year.

NRCS District Conservationist Greg White presented soil health information including demonstrations. The Soil Health Summer Series is supported by Michigan State University Extension and Michigan Farm Bureau.

Lake County farmer Jack Thornton demonstrates planting cover crops into a standing soybean field using a modified no-till drill (above right). NRCS District Conservationist Greg White performs a soil health demonstration as part of the soil health field day (below right).



Identifying Trees Using Features other than Leaves

by Julie Crick, Michigan State University Extension

There are many features that may be used to identify a tree, and if you have an interest in trees, it can be fun to learn about the variety of unique characteristics of each species. Learning the characteristics other than leaves can be difficult, that's why it Michigan State University Extension educators think it is a good idea to begin to learn with the leaves on the trees, and then continue the challenge once that easily recognizable clue has fallen off.

Leaves

Leaves are a great starting point for tree identification. And as mentioned above, leaves can provide a confirmation of species

identification as you begin to test the use of other characteristics. A couple of tips about using leaves for identification may help to make things easier. The leaves found on the lower branches of deciduous trees, or trees that lose their leaves, may be larger than the leaves found on the upper branches and are typically called, "shade leaves" because they spend most of the summer in part to full shade. Leaf shape, and not size should be used in identification.

Tall trees with leaves well out of reach can provide some challenges to confirming a tree species. In this case, use binoculars to get a close up view of the leaves. Or search the ground

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Identifying Trees Using Features other than Leaves

around the tree for leaves that may have fallen off the tree. You may also find other signs that can confirm the species of the tree in question in the form of seeds or clippings of entire branches delivered by squirrels for your use in identification.

Opposite versus alternate branching

Most tree identification resources start with asking if the tree has opposite or alternate branching. This refers to the orientation of the twigs with the branches. Opposite branching refers to a branching pattern where side branches, leaves and leaf scars grow from the stem directly across from each other. Examples of trees that grow with this pattern include maples, ash and buckeye trees. Alternate branching refers to a pattern where side branches, leaves and leaf scars do not grow directly across from each other. Alternate branching is much more common than opposite. So, when you spot an opposite branching tree, you've greatly narrowed down the possible species of the tree you are identifying.

Bark

Identifying a tree by its bark requires practice. Bark characteristics can change drastically as the tree ages. Bark differs from species to species by color, texture, and pattern. The bark for some species may be more distinct than others, so start with taking serious note of the bark on the trees that are in your immediate surroundings. Use the leaves to confirm the species. Then try to spot this tree species by bark in other places close by. Once you've mastered one species of tree, move on to the next, paying special attention to differences with the first. Continue this pattern and you'll be a master of tree identification using bark just about the time the leaves fall off the trees.

Twigs

Amazingly enough, each species of tree also has a unique twig. Twig refers to the outermost portion of a branch that grows new leaves or needles. Twigs have a variety of characteristics that may be used for identification of the tree from which it came including the color, texture of bark,

thickness, and shape. The most commonly used characteristics, however, are the bud that forms at or near the tip of the twig and the scar left on the twig from current and sometimes previous years leaves.

Each spring, trees grow new leaves or needles so that they most efficiently produce food throughout the summer that supports reproduction and helps sustain the tree through the year. The new leaves grow, or elongate out of buds that the tree created near the end of the previous growing season. More information about buds can be found in a previous Michigan State University News article about trees preparing for winter. Buds have different shapes, colors, sizes, and features making buds one of the easiest ways to identify a tree. For example, maples generally have pointed buds, while oaks always have a cluster of buds at the end of each twig.

Leaf scars refer to the outline of the petiole, or stem of the leaf, that is left on the twig from previous year's leaves. The same shapes may also be visible when the current year's leaves are carefully pulled off the twig. Within the leaf scar is usually evidence of the water and nutrient transport tubes that connected the petiole to the tree's vascular system.

As you may now realize, there are a number of characteristics that may be used to identify a tree. This article provided a few of the easiest ways to start the journey. Once you begin to notice a tree's unique characteristics, it's hard to resist.

Michigan Tree Identification Resources:

- [USDA Plants Database](#)
- [Identification resource for trees found in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan](#)
- [Michigan Forests Forever Tree Identification Guide \(pdf\)](#)
- [A Guide for using Michigan Native Trees for Landscaping \(pdf\)](#)

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

Making the Case for Lead-Free Recreation

by Maureen Stine, Soil Conservationist

Do you hunt or fish in Michigan? If so, you are one of the millions of individuals - both resident and non-resident sportspersons who partake in recreational wildlife sports in our state. According to the 2011 National Survey of Hunting & Fishing by the US Fish and Wildlife Service, Michigan had a total of 1,744,000 licensed anglers, and 529,000 licensed hunters across the state. Together we pumped \$6.1 million into Michigan's economy supporting our beloved outdoor sports.

I fall within the angler tally and spend many enjoyable winter weekends teaching kids to fish the hard water of inland lakes across the 'tip of the mitt.' Years ago, while serving the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, I implemented a small children's program entitled, "Gettin' Jiggy With It." The program enabled each young participant to powder-paint a fishing jig to take home and hopefully put to some use.

Using a heated Sterno for fuel, some powder paint from my local sporting goods store, a set of hemostats and a fishing jig, each child was able to creatively paint their own jig to take home and hopefully put to some use. A few days went by after my program and I received an email from MDNR Wildlife Biologist, Tom Cooley. He mentioned he saw the advertisement of my jig-painting program and inquired if I was using lead-free jigs. I was not. He urged me to look into the possibility of using lead-free tackle for this and other programs and shared some dreadful statistics with me.

Cooley currently serves the MDNR as the state's leading wildlife pathologist. Affectionately dubbed, "Cooley M.E.", he spends his year completing autopsies on various animal carcasses to determine cause of death. According to Cooley, the wildlife species most affected by lead poisoning from tackle and ammo are avian species, and in Michigan the two most affected are the common loon by fishing tackle and the bald eagle by bullet fragments (from gut



Soil Conservationist and Earth Team Volunteer Maureen Stine (far right) helps children make lead-free fishing tackle.

piles or unrecovered harvested animals, most likely deer). In studies going back to 1987, lead poisoning in loons in Michigan is the third highest mortality factor in birds examined at 16 percent. For bald eagles in Michigan, lead poisoning is also the third highest mortality factor in birds examined at 10.4 percent (in recent years this figure has been higher (11.4-16.8 percent). Cooley adds, "While these figures aren't staggering, they are likely under-representative of the actual number since sick loons and eagles would probably search out areas to hide because they were sick and wouldn't be as likely to be found as one that died from trauma which are usually human associated forms of mortality." Additionally, these numbers could be drastically reduced or eliminated by the use of non-toxic fishing tackle and ammunition.

Cooley shares that there are other species where elevated levels have been detected but effects to the animals have been harder to document. As far as fish species, Cooley's team found lead negatively impacting rainbow trout. Clinical signs were spinal curvature, tail atrophy, muscular and neurological degeneration, growth inhibition, impaired immune function, anemia, reduced blood delta aminolevulinic acid dehydratase levels, depressed reproductive

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Hannahville Indian School gets Seasonal High Tunnel

by Arthur Franke, Soil Conservationist Student Trainee

The Hannahville Indian Community has a new seasonal high tunnel with financial assistance from the NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program. The high tunnel will be used by students at the tribe's Nah Tah Wahsh (Soaring Eagle) Charter School.

A seasonal high tunnel is a metal frame structure covered in plastic that allows producers to extend the growing season. Crops can be grown in the high tunnel nearly year-round. When completed, students at the K-12 school will grow vegetables for both the school and the surrounding community.

The school's existing greenhouse and the seasonal high tunnel will provide a valuable educational and work experience for the students involved. A major goal of the project is to teach traditional Native American farming methods and food preparation methods to students, in addition to gardening and agricultural skills.

A lack of access to healthy, nutritious food has been identified as a major resource concern for the Hannahville Indian Community. Providing resources for a healthy diet, the vegetables grown in the SHT will help combat diabetes and other health issues among the elder population in the community.



Arthur Franke, soil conservationist student trainee, assisted with a seasonal high tunnel project for the Hannahville Indian Community in Menominee County (top). The SHT was built at the tribe's Nah Tah Wahsh Charter School and will be utilized by students to grow food and learn about traditional food production (above).

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Making the Case for Lead-Free Recreation

success, paralysis, and death.

If you Google, 'lead free tackle or ammo in Michigan' your choices for vendors are inherently limited at this point in time and all lead-free vendors of either hunting or fishing supplies are located out-of-state.

The government banned lead in house paint in 1978 after decades of industry blaming 'careless parents'. The Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990 and EPA regulations banned lead in gasoline after 1995. With any luck, or more aggressive

actions and strong messages for the industry, perhaps we will also see the arrival of available, affordable and abundant lead-free ammo and tackle in sporting goods stores across our beautiful state.

Visit www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,4570,7-153-10370_12150_12220-26676--,00.html for additional information on the impacts of lead on Michigan's wildlife.

MSU Nutrient Management Plot Tour

Online registration is now open for Michigan State University Extension's annual Nutrient Management Update and Plot Tour. This event will be held at the MSU Plant Pathology Research Farm, 3735 North College Road, Lansing, on Wednesday, Sept. 9, from 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.



The event will highlight the MSU field crops nutrient management applied research program. After the initial introductions and overview, participants will be escorted in wagon tours to view several applied research projects. The topics include nitrification inhibitors, starter versus pop-up starter fertilizer, soil health and microbial activity, fall cover crops, 4R stewardship practices and wheat management.

The scope and complexity of this research program is designed to address vital issues confronting the Michigan field crops industry such as soil health, climate change, phosphorus management and environmental stewardship. We will review proactive and voluntary practices to potentially avoid risk situations such as the Lake Erie. There has been a lot of misinformation in the media regarding the role of farming practices on environmental issues. This program is intended for farmers, crop consultants, educators, fertilizer retail industry, federal and state officials and MAEAP professionals.

An outdoor cookout lunch will be featured. Participants will receive 5.5 CCA credits, three MDARD credits and one MAEAP phase I credit.

To view the program brochure and to register online or by mail, please visit the Nutrient Management Update and Plot Tour Event page. If you have questions on registration, please contact Kurt Steinke at ksteinke@msu.edu or me at silvag@msu.edu or 517-543-4467.

This article was published by Michigan State University Extension. For more information, visit www.msue.msu.edu.

Celebrate our Rivers

The public is invited to enjoy a cruise on the Grand River while learning about conservation efforts to conserve Michigan's river resources.

A Celebrate our Rivers cruise on the Michigan Princess is planned for Sept. 17, with passengers boarding at 5:30 p.m. at Grand River Park in Lansing. The cruise includes dinner and presentations on water quality testing results, local conservation efforts and talks by conservation experts. There is a registration fee of \$20, attendees can register online at <http://celebraterivers.eventbrite.com>

The cruise is sponsored by the Eaton, Ingham and Clinton conservation districts, the Tri-County Regional Planning Commission, MSU Institute of Water Research and the Mid-Michigan Environmental Action Council among others.

NRCS-Michigan Staffing Update

New Hires/Reassignments:

Ayanna Madison, Financial Resource Specialist – State Office

Michael Stermock, Business Services Specialist – State Office (Transferred from California)

Oliver Freeman, Soil Conservationist – Bad Axe

Alisha Brown, Soil Conservationist – Cassopolis

Bryan Zabel, District Conservationist – Tawas City

Boyd Byelich, District Conservationist – Midland (Transferred from Colorado)

Anneke Vermeulen, Soil Conservationist – Ann Arbor

Dextrin Dorsey, Soil Conservationist – Moved from Saginaw to Ann Arbor

Katelyn Salowitz, Soil Conservationist – Moved from Owosso to Lapeer

Departures:

Kent Dankenbring, District Conservationist – Sault Ste. Marie (Transferred to Indiana)

Bryce Rinkenberger, Soil Conservationist – Paw Paw (Accepted a position with the Peace Corps)

L Bryan Hill, Area Engineer – Marquette – Retired

Upcoming Events - Upcoming Events - Upcoming Events - Upcoming Events

September

- 4-5 Well Water Testing - St. Joseph County, 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., St. Joseph Conservation District - Centreville, for more information call 269/ 467-6336 ext. 5
- 7-9 Well Water Testing - Branch County, 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Branch Conservation District - Coldwater, for more information call 517/278-2725 ext. 5
- 8 Iosco County Farm Tour, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., Mitchell Creek LLC - Whittemore, lunch included, call 989/343-0923 or 231/794-8879 for more information and to RSVP
- 10 Ionia Conservation District Clean Sweep, (collection of herbicides and pesticides), 8 a.m. to noon, Crop Production Services - Sunfield, contact the Ionia CD for more information at 616/527-2620 ext. 101
- 10 Tuscola MAEAP Field Day, 1 p.m. to 5 p.m., Zwerk and Sons Farm - Vassar, dinner provided, to RSVP contact the Tuscola CD at 989/673-8174 ext. 3 or Tuscola Farm Bureau at 989/673-4157 by Sept. 8
- 10 Hillsdale County Nutrient Management Field Day, 8 a.m. to 1:30 p.m., Stoney Ridge Farms - Waldron, lunch provided, for more information and to RSVP call the Hillsdale Conservation District at 517/849-9890 ext. 3
- 11 Tree Farm Field Day, 9:30 a.m., Onaway, \$5 registration fee - lunch provided, for more information call 989/734-4000
- 12 Isabella County Tire Recycling Collection, 9 a.m. to noon, Isabella County Fair Grounds - Mt. Pleasant, contact the Isabella Conservation District for more information at 989/772-9152 ext.3
- 12 Barry County Outdoor Recreation Youth Day, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Charlton Park - Hastings, contact the Barry Conservation District for more information at 269/948-8056 ext. 3
- 12 Household Hazardous Waste Collection, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., Roscommon County Road Commission - Prudenville, for more information all 989/275-3163
- 12 Forestry and Wildlife Habitat Field Day, 9 a.m. to noon, Mark & Debra Jackson Tree Farm - Kingsley, registration \$5/person by Sept. 10, call 231/775-7681 ext. 3 or 231/256-9783 ext. 264
- 16 Montcalm Conservation District Educational Tour, 8:45 a.m. to 4 p.m., \$15 registration fee includes lunch, leave from St. Bernadette Catholic Church - Stanton, call 989/831-4606 ext. 5 for more information and to register

- 17 Celebrate our Rivers - Michigan Princess River Cruise, 5:30 to 8:30 p.m., Grand River Park - Lansing, \$30 registration includes river cruise and dinner, for more information go to [event web page](#)
- 22 Stream Team Volunteer Training, 6 p.m. to 8 p.m., Ingham Conservation District - Mason, for more information go to www.inghamconservation.com
- 23 Cover Crops Field Day, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., Read Farms - Fenwick, lunch provided, call the Ionia Conservation District at 616/527-2620 by Sept. 9 to register
- 25 Allegan Conservation District 75th Anniversary Celebration, 6 p.m. to 7 p.m., Saugatuck Brewing Co. - Saugatuck, for more information go to www.allegancd.org
- 25 Agri Palooza Conservation Festival, MSU Agricultural Research Station - Chatham, for more information contact the Marquette Conservation District at 906/226-2461 ext.5
- 24-26 Forest Connections Conference - Michigan Forest Association, Bay City, for more information go to michiganforests.org
- 26 Stream Team Collection Day, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., Ingham Conservation District - Mason, for more information go to www.inghamconservation.com
- 26 Conservation Expo, AuSable River Center - Roscommon, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.,
- 30 Van Buren Conservation District Fall Farm Field Day, 4 p.m. to 7 p.m., Meechum Farm - Lawrence, RSVP by Sept. 25 at 269/657-4030 ext. 5 or online at www.vanburenCD.org

October

- 10 Green Space Trail Race, 9 a.m., Ingham Conservation District - Mason, for more information go to www.inghamconservation.com
- 26 Michigan Chapter of the Soil and Water Conservation Society Annual Meeting, Shanty Creeks Resort - Bellaire, for more information call 989/733-2694 ext. 105
- 26-28 Michigan Association of Conservation District Annual Meeting, Shanty Creeks Resort - Bellaire, for more information go to www.macd.org

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