

Helping People Help the Land

Conservation Notes

USDA - Natural Resources Conservation Service - Michigan

May/June 2020



State Conservationist's Message

Usually the first page of the newsletter features a story from the field on how NRCS is helping a producer implement new conservation activities. As we step back and only have face-to-face interactions for essential business, that won't be the case this time.

As NRCS-Michigan employees we've dealt with furloughs and all manner of weather extremes but coping with the Covid-19 pandemic is new for all of us I trust. Since the middle of March we've all been adjusting to a new work environment. Many of you have had to balance working with home with childcare, caring for other family members and other challenges.

As we approach four months of operating on a maximum telework status, NRCS-Michigan has been able to accomplish our highest priority tasks. I commend you for continuing to be productive through these unfamiliar times. With construction season now well underway and more deadlines looming there will continue to be challenges but I am confident we will meet them.

This is the time of year that USDA holds its Feds Feed Families food drive campaign. While USDA employees are able to continue working we know this is not the case for everyone. This summer will be particularly hard for people who work in Michigan's summer tourism industry. While Michigan has started to "open up" it seems apparent that the hospitality and customer service sectors, as well as others, will continue to struggle. As we work

individually from home we will also need to support the FFF campaign from home. One way to do this is to support your local food bank. You can find your local food bank by visiting the Food Bank Council of Michigan's website. I hope you will consider making a donation if you're able and support the FFF campaign.



State Conservationist
Garry Lee



NRCS-Michigan is in the midst of bringing on a large number of new employees. We've hired 13 new employees since the end of April and hope to add as many or more before the end of the calendar year. Our

Pathways student interns have also arrived for a summer of field work to get them ready for a future NRCS career.

Here at the state office some familiar faces will be taking on new responsibilities. Dan Zay, formerly our state biologist is now our State Resource Conservationist. Based on his performance as state biologist since 2013, I am sure he will do a good job.

Two additional employees will be taking on different responsibilities. Abby Smith, formerly program coordinator for the Conservation Stewardship Program, is now our state agronomist and Di'Shun Melbert, formerly a soil conservationist in Grand Haven will be taking over as district conservationist in Portage. Congratulations Abby and Di'Shun.

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2020 Pollinator Partnership Poster Available

The Pollinator Partnership, which includes NRCS has released its 2020 poster entitled “Our Future Flies with Pollinators.” The poster is available to NRCS and Conservation District offices free of charge, while supplies last, through the [NRCS Distribution Center](#).

Artists were invited to submit images based on this year’s theme. Fiorella Ikeue, a graduate of Kalamazoo College, now living in Oakland, Calif., had her artwork selected.

“When I saw the theme for this year’s poster, I envisioned imagery that was informative and easy to understand as well as beautiful.

A central circle evokes the planet and a lens through which we view the world, and the honeycomb structure houses icons that represent ecosystem services provided by pollinators,” is how Ikeue explained her artwork for the Pollinator Partnership [website](#).

The Pollinator Partnership’s mission is to promote the health of pollinators, critical to food and ecosystems, through conservation, education, and research. The Partnership was founded in 1997. One of its accomplishments was the creation of National Pollinator Week, which this year took place the week of June 22.



The Pollinator Partnership’s annual poster for 2020.

It’s, It’s, the Bioblitz

- submitted by MSU Extension

Want to take an opportunity to explore the outdoors and get to know the plants, trees, and critters while contributing to local citizen science efforts? Join our July Bioblitz and Beyond project! Twelve organizations across the state are joining together to recruit volunteers to visit one of their properties, using iNaturalist to catalog various flora and fauna. We will offer an online orientation via webinar on July 9th from noon-1pm, where you get to know the basics of a bioblitz using iNaturalist, and have a chance to meet the organizers. Participation during the bioblitz is on your own, at your own pace, at any time from July 9th until the 31st!

We will also offer Thursday webinar lunch-ins throughout the month (July 16th, 23rd, 30th) with natural resource experts on a range of topics, including wild animal encounters, invasive plant ID, tree and shrub ID, and interpreting animal calls.

Once the bioblitz collection period is over, we will encourage everyone to gather around the webinar one more time on Thursday, August 6th at noon to reveal the complete summary of your contributions via iNaturalist! All participants who complete a bioblitz inventory will receive a certificate of

completion.

Registration is FREE, online via Michigan State University Extension (registration will be open soon—visit our Michigan Bioblitz page for the registration link). Once registration is confirmed, webinar agendas and webinar connection information will be emailed to you.

This project is hosted by Michigan State University Extension, in generous partnership with:

Upper Peninsula Land Conservancy, Little Forks Conservancy; Benzie, Clare, Grand Traverse, Ingham and Leelanau conservation districts, Michigan Forest Association, Corey Marsh Ecological Research Center, Mid Michigan Land Conservancy, Harris Nature Center, Woldumar Nature Center.

If you have any questions about this project, contact Julie Crick, MSU Forestry Extension Educator at crickjul@msu.edu or Georgia Peterson, MSU Natural Resources Extension Specialist at petersog@msu.edu.

Google doc link: <https://sites.google.com/msu.edu/july-2020-bioblitz-and-beyond/home>.

Conservation Amid Pandemic: The Piping Plovers of Waugoshance Point

by Maureen Stine, Earth Team Volunteer - Petoskey

Arguably the most aesthetically beautiful place in northern Michigan is Waugoshance Point, a historic, cultural and natural treasure in the northwest corner of Emmet County. The point is a peninsula spanning 3 miles of undeveloped beachfront on northern Lake Michigan and regarded as the gem of Wilderness State Park. The name Waugoshance is a hybrid word which combines the Anishinaabemowin word, wah'goosh meaning, 'fox' and the French word, anse meaning 'cove'. It is here where some of the Great Lakes population of the piping plover (*Charadrius melodus*) shorebirds return to breed throughout April and May from their wintering southern beaches of the Carolinas, Florida and the Gulf of Mexico.

Market hunting for piping plover meat and feathers began the species decline in the 1900's. Over time

the Lacey Act, the Migratory Birds Treaty Act and the 1986 listing of the Great Lakes Piping Plover (GLPIPL) population as federally endangered under the U.S. Endangered Species Act helped to curtail the population decline. However the negative impact from a growing industry of recreation, shrinking habitat from development on beaches, pollution and predators launched a conservation partnership project of agencies, organizations and individuals who worked together to bring the plovers back from the brink of extirpation. Conservation efforts include an extensive banding program to track individual plovers and broods all year along with implementing direct management techniques like erecting signage for psychological fencing to keep people and pets away from nesting and foraging locations, constructing nest enclosures

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Zay Selected as State Resource Conservationist

Effective June 22, former State Biologist Dan Zay is serving as NRCS-Michigan's state resource conservationist. As state resource conservationist, Zay manages the staff of the Ecological Sciences Department which provides support for the technical aspects of agricultural conservation for Farm Bill programs and the NRCS field offices.



State Resource
Conservationist
Dan Zay

Zay came to Michigan from Indiana in 2013 to serve as NRCS-Michigan's state biologist. He takes over as state resource conservationist from Betsy Dierberger, who now serves as the NRCS national agronomist.

Prior to the NRCS, Dan worked for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, 404 Regulatory Program, Louisville District, where he provided wetland permit review and enforcement throughout Indiana. After graduating from Purdue University, Dan began his career as the Roadside Coordinator for the Indiana Department of Transportation, and then worked as a Regional Ecologist for the Indiana DNR, Division of Nature Preserves, managing 43 nature preserves in west central Indiana. In 1994 he entered

the private sector as a consultant leading wetland permitting and mitigation projects, biological studies, and conducted NEPA clearance efforts for transportation and airport projects throughout the Midwest.

Dan has extensive wetland experience gained in the public and private sectors. Dan has completed hundreds of wetland permitting projects in five states and six Corps Districts. He also served on the Peer Review Team of the Midwest Regional Supplement and was an instructor for the Corps Regulatory IV - Wetland Delineation Course.

Other special experience includes knowledge about native grasslands gained while developing the first native plant nursery in Indiana. Because of his interest in prairie, Dan has become skilled in the practice of prescription burning and previously developed contract prescription burn services in Indiana and Michigan with the IDNR and MDOT as clients.

His personal interests include hunting, sailing and managing prairie plantings. Dan resides in Grand Ledge, MI with his wife Ulrika, daughter Jenoa and son Oliver. His grown sons Nicholas and Joshua live in the Indianapolis area.

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Conservation Amid Pandemic: The Piping Plovers of Waugoshance Point

over eggs to protect them from predators, monitoring nests for predation and washouts from summer storms, captive rearing for abandoned or flooded nests and public interpretation of this shoreline specialist species. Historically, approximately 500 - 800 piping plover pairs nested throughout the Great Lakes but by 1990 had declined to about a dozen pairs, all in Northern Michigan. Across the Great Lakes there are a total of 61 pairs and 65 nests so far during this 2020 season.

Waugoshance Point is the location that essentially saved the Great Lakes population from extirpation. It was the one remaining hotspot of nesting at the time of listing as federally endangered. Another important aspect is that park management has demonstrated consistent support and put plovers above human activities. Initially there was some concern about closing off trails that cut through plover habitat (because of fishing and desire of anglers to walk certain routes) but the park quickly decided to alter these routes helping reduce human/plover interactions on the beach. Due to the global pandemic of Covid 19, the nearby campgrounds at Wilderness State Park were closed several weeks beyond than their usual summer opening. This delay helped keep visitor traffic down providing plovers with more space and solitude for breeding and raising chicks.

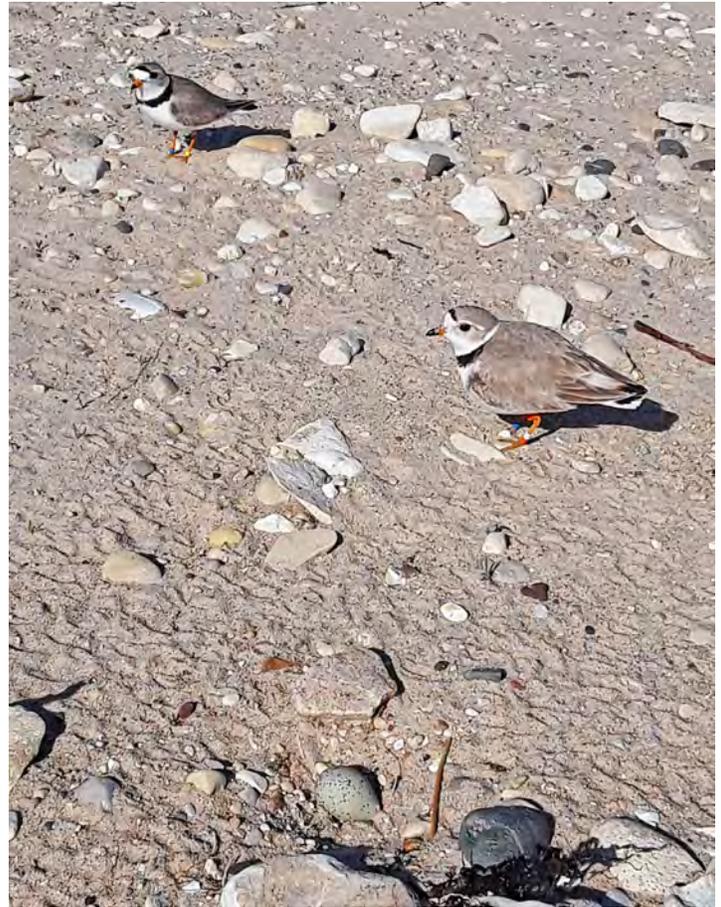
Piping plovers typically breed with the same partner each year and lay a 4-egg clutch which hatch after approximately 23 days. The new hatchlings can feed themselves their diet of insects and worms and all hatchlings are banded for identification at about one week old. Adults protect and raise their young for several weeks until they can fly and plovers begin their southern migration late July into early August.

"I think this is a critical program" explains Bill Borgeld, District Conservationist for the Petoskey Field Office, "any conservation that supports the plovers and helps protect and increase their population numbers is good for species diversity. The system as a whole improves. We've seen what happens when species' numbers drop; it negatively impacts flora and fauna alike."

For more information on the conservation of piping plovers visit: www.greatlakespipingplover.org/

(above right) A male and female pair of piping plovers with a single egg in the foreground. (right) Earth Team volunteer Maureen Stine installs an enclosure to protect plover eggs.

-photos submitted by Maureen Stine



NRCS-Michigan Welcomes New Staff Members

NRCS-Michigan has brought on 13 new employees since late April. Some of them are familiar faces who have worked with conservation districts, others are new to the state or returning.

We contacted as many of them as possible so you could learn a little bit about them.

Tamara Buitenwerf - District Conservationist, Ionia

Last Position & Location: Business Tools Specialist, Northeast Iowa.

Home Town: Howard City

Education: Bachelors of Science in Agriculture Education and Plant Science - California State University, Fresno

Family: Married for 17 years to Ryan. We have 4 children: Scott (15), Bethany (13), Judah (12), and Eva (4).

Hobbies & Interests: Our family enjoys kayaking, camp fires, cards, and shooting archery together. I love to bow hunt, work on the farm, and garden.



Jeff Fewless - Soil Conservationist, Cadillac

Last Position & Location: CTAI Soil Conservationist for Missaukee Conservation District

Home Town: Tustin

Education: Applied Biology - Ferris State University

Family: My spouse Lyndie and three children (triplets) Jace, Brynn and Brylee. Our family has three pets, a dog named Reece and two rabbits named Arlo and Oreo.

Hobbies & Interests: My hobbies include fishing with my kids and teaching them about the outdoors. I am interested in camping, hunting and experiencing the great outdoors with my family.



Sam Fullen - Soil Conservationist, Bay City

Last Position & Location: Lab Tech in an environmental health laboratory with the Navy Medical Research Unit in Dayton, Ohio

Home Town: Wilmington, Ohio

Education: Masters of Science in Plant and Environmental Sciences - New Mexico State University

Family: Just me and my pooch, Carl

Hobbies & Interests: camping; hiking - I summited a few smaller mountains in New Mexico; road trips; recreational rowing; cross-cultural experiences, especially food (I served in Peace Corps – Ghana); live music

Kent Schriber - Soil Conservationist, Caro

Last Position & Location: Contribution Agreement Employee between NRCS and Tuscola Conservation District

Home Town: Caro

Education: Degree in Crop & Soil Sciences - Michigan State University

Family: My wife and I have been married for almost 3 years now.

Hobbies & Interests: Farming, Hunting and Fishing, Wrenching and just being outside.

Stacey Smith - Soil Conservationist Lapeer

Last Position & Location:

Conservation Project Manager, The Land Conservancy of San Luis Obispo County, Calif.

Home Town: New Richmond, Ohio

Education: M.S. Agriculture, Soil Science - California Polytechnic State University

Family: Husband, Bryan ; three children, Kelsey,

Charlotte and Gavin; pet dog Bella and a flock of chickens!

Hobbies & Interests: Running, mountain biking, camping, reading, drawing, vegetable gardening and hanging with my family outside!



Matthew Swain - Soil Conservationist, Mason

Last Position & Location: Conservation Technician – Genesee Conservation District

Home Town: North Branch

Education: B.S. in Environmental Science and Planning - University of Michigan, Flint

Hobbies & Interests: Aquariums, Dungeons & Dragons, Paintball, Plants, Reading

Additional New(ish) Hires

Luis Matir Diaz - District Conservationist, Stanton

Angel Domenech-Emmanuelli, Soil Scientist, Gaylord

Amy Frye - Soil Conservationist, Marquette

Shannon Keefer - Soil Conservationist, Saginaw

Shawn Kelly - Soil Conservationist, Charlotte

Brett Riser - Soil Conservation Technician, Centreville

Kelly Sipl - Soil conservationist, Marquette

Working for Conservation from Home



Tiberius the cockatiel loves his window perch above the desk of Katie Grzesiak (GTCD Invasive Species Network)



Tuscola County District Conservationist Carol Schadd's workmate Lucy.



Jeff Douglas's (district conservationist Paw Paw) cat, Mischief, enjoys the space where the laptop needs to sit.



The view from David Buck's (agricultural engineer - Traverse City) home office.



(left) Tim LeQuier's (soil conservationist - Onaway) cat, Santa's Little Helper, has a fondness for his laptop.

(right) Public Affairs Specialist Brian Buehler's on-going effort at creating a pollinator garden.



Upcoming Online Events - Upcoming Online Events - Upcoming Online Events

July

- 8 Wild About Backyard Conservation Webinar Series - Eyes on the Forest, for more information go to www.canr.msu.edu/events
- 9 Bioblitz Online Orientation, noon to 1 p.m., for more information and to register visit the [Bioblitz webpage](#), story on page 3
- 22 Wild About Backyard Conservation Webinar Series - Ponds don't Need Pampering, for more information go to www.canr.msu.edu/events

August

- 12 Wild About Backyard Conservation Webinar Series - Cattails on Fire, for more information go to www.canr.msu.edu/events
- 26 Wild About Backyard Conservation Webinar Series - Who is in my Yard?, for more information go to www.canr.msu.edu/events
- 27 Autumn Olive Community Workshop, 5 to 7 p.m., online event sponsored by the Grand Traverse Conservation District, register at www.habitatmatters.org/wufoo-registration.html
- 29 Red Cedar River Cleanup, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., McCormick Park - Williamston, for more information and to register go to <https://inghamconservation.com/events>

September

- 2 Purple Martin Talk & Walk, 6:30 p.m. to 8p.m., Ingham Conservation District - Mason, for more information and to register go to <https://inghamconservation.com/events>
- 9 Wild About Backyard Conservation Webinar Series - Don't Flush That, for more information go to www.canr.msu.edu/events
- 12 Forestry Field Day - "Forests for the Future - Utilizing Tools for Success," 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., Jan Malik property -in Grant Twp., Grand Traverse County, contact Kama Ross, District Forester, 231/256-9783 or kama.ross@macd.org for more information



Happy 4th of July!



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Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language, etc.) should contact the responsible Agency or USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339. Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English.