

Helping People Help the Land

Conservation Notes

USDA - Natural Resources Conservation Service - Michigan

January/February 2021

Neighbors' Conservation Efforts Help Bees & Grow Food



(above left) Tony Przewrocki with the high tunnel he built utilizing assistance from the Environmental Quality Incentives Program. In addition to growing vegetables in his high tunnel, Przewrocki also raises bees, he and his neighbor improved forage for his bees by planting pollinator habitat on their farms.

by Craig Aho, District Conservationist - Menominee County

It all started with an inquiry to the local NRCS office about honeybee pasture in 2017. Tony Przewrocki had never heard of NRCS or USDA programs, but news of a program supporting honeybee production led him to inquire at the Stephenson NRCS Field Office. Shortly after an initial field visit with the district conservationist, Tony submitted an Environmental Quality Incentives Program application for Conservation Cover and Windbreak / Shelterbelt Establishment to support his five new honeybee hives. With the assistance of the local district conservationist, Tony chose a shrub mix suited for his soils that would provide a more diverse pasture for his honeybees and native pollinators. He also implemented a cool season

grass/legume mix and a native warm season grass/ forb mix to renovate an old hay field on the farm. To complete the fieldwork, he employed the assistance of his neighbor, Terry Dobrzanski.

Terry soon became interested in NRCS Programs as well, and subsequently requested a field visit which resulted in an EQIP application for cool season grasses and legumes, flowering native shrubs and a high tunnel system to increase the productivity of his vegetable garden. This work completed, Terry decided that a Conservation Stewardship Program application could further bolster his property management. Through CSP, Terry hopes to establish native grasses and forbs to benefit native pollinators, Tony's honeybees, and local wildlife

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USDA - Natural Resources Conservation Service

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State Conservationist's Message

With the confirmation of Tom Vilsack as Agriculture Secretary under the Biden administration, we welcome him back to the USDA. At the same time, we convey our appreciation to outgoing Secretary Sonny Perdue for his leadership these past four years and wish him continued success.

Below is Secretary Vilsack's message to USDA employees upon his confirmation.

As I say in my [welcome video](#), I know a lot has changed in the 4-plus years since I departed USDA as a member of the Obama-Biden Administration—but one thing hasn't changed, and that is my appreciation and respect for all of you.

You are a talented, dedicated team. We have a lot to do and I know that you have the energy, creativity, and commitment to get it done.

As we get started on this journey, I want us all to be committed to one common purpose: to be a USDA that represents and serves all Americans. We cannot truly be the People's Department as President Lincoln intended unless we truly serve all people. We will be a USDA that is committed to ensuring equity across the Department, removing barriers to access, and building a workforce more representative of America.

We also must protect our workforce during the pandemic. Your safety is my top priority. That's why wearing a mask, maintaining physical distance, and making sure our workers have access to PPE, testing and vaccines when they are available are essential. As the federal government responds to the pandemic, you may be asked to contribute to the effort—please do your best to help. USDA plays an important role in the federal response. Together, we will contain and end the pandemic if we work together and respond to President Biden's call to action.

The pandemic has also exposed the disturbing truth about hunger and nutrition insecurity in America. Today, 30 million adults and as many as 14 million children—more than 1 in 5 Black and Latino households—report they do not have enough food to eat. That's why we must remove barriers to access for anyone who qualifies for federal nutrition assistance—SNAP, WIC, Pandemic-EBT, school meals and more. And we must ensure federal nutrition programs set an example by promoting nutrition security and access to healthy food choices.

Even as we do that, we must continue to deliver fundamental

services to the American people—fair markets for our farmers and ranchers, safe food, clean water and last-mile broadband, energy security, sound infrastructure, and business services. In rural America, we must build back better, stronger, and more resilient and equitably than ever before. We must put food, farming and forestry at the center of climate smart practices by building new markets—including in renewable energy and biobased manufacturing—and creating new streams of income for producers and landowners. We must remove the burden of debt, provide



State Conservationist
Garry Lee

access to land and capital, and build systems to create long-term prosperity for farmers. Finally, we must commit to building or rebuilding infrastructure in rural America that supports a local and regional food system; that embraces renewable energy; that provides broadband connectivity to strengthen education, health care, and public services. Beyond infrastructure, USDA must provide access to capital and financing for rural businesses to create jobs, grow the tax base and cultivate diverse, equitable communities.

Finally, I won't rest until USDA is considered one of the best places to work in the federal government. Our job in leadership is to make USDA a safe, fair and rewarding workplace for all employees. We want our staff to love to come to work every day, doing the important work that will help move our country forward. So, we must listen and collaborate. We must protect scientific integrity and provide outlets to share feedback. And we must work at rebuilding expertise in our agencies and restoring the confidence of our workforce.

I want to close by thanking you for what you do each day. Your work makes a difference in the lives of more than 330 million Americans and billions of global citizens each day. I'm glad to be back.

- Secretary Vilsack

Official fiscal year 2020 NRCS-Michigan program statistics are available on the [website](#).

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Neighbors' Conservation Efforts Help Bees & Grow Food



(above left) Menominee County farmer Terry Dobrzanski stands in front of his high tunnel, Dobrzanski also received financial assistance for his tunnel through EQIP. Dobrzanski's barn can be seen in the background, behind his neighbor's pollinator planting.

while enhancing property aesthetics. When asked about his experience with the agency, Terry says that "(NRCS Practices) helped us go back to a natural, environmentally safer, older, more natural way of life." Terry reports that the farmette way of life is good, especially during Covid 19.

Back across the property line, Tony admits that a lot of his farming success is a result of trial and error. "It takes teamwork and commitment to make it work when using no pesticides. This creates a new set of problems." He stays up to date on agronomic techniques by attending regional field days and cooperates with MSU Extension, NRCS and the Menominee Conservation District. "All the trees I've planted since 1993 came from the conservation district." The trees he purchased, including spruce, red pine, black walnut, multiple species of apple, and fruit/nut bearing shrubs – most with innovative protection from deer and small rodents – can be observed on the property. Tony's willingness to leverage assistance from NRCS technical and financial assistance programs have resulted in 4 successful NRCS contracts across his entire farm operation.

During the 2020 season, Tony's efforts yielded 25 gallons of honey and he reports that he was able to capture three separate swarms that he moved back into his hives; he reports that it was a busy bee 2020!

As for 2021, plans are in the works to host a NRCS / Conservation District Field Day to increase interest in NRCS and conservation district programs and to showcase innovative small farm management techniques including honey production, high tunnel system building / management, tree/shrub establishment and warm season grass and forb management.

Both Tony and Terry are actively engaged and open to new information and techniques for the proactive management of their farms. Their shared efforts have resulted in converting a little 35 acre corner of southern Menominee County from a fallow field into a diverse, sustainable working farm area showcasing multiple environmental benefits -- a testament to how teamwork between beginning farmers and local agencies can get good conservation on the ground!

(right) Interior of Przewrocki's high tunnel.



NRCS-Michigan Welcomes New Employees

Darron Felton Jr. - District Conservationist, Flint

Darron graduated in December 2015 from Fort Valley State University, in Fort Valley, Ga., with a B.S. in Plant Environment Soil Science. He interned with NRCS as a Soil Conservationist in Saginaw. Darron is a Georgia Bulldog fan and originally from Montezuma, Ga. He has worked with NRCS for 4 and a half years as a Soil Conservationist in North Carolina and is excited to join the Flint office. Darron's hobbies are coaching football and baseball, breeding American Bullies, gardening, and drag racing.

Santosh K. Ojha - District Conservationist, Kimball

Santosh specializes in biology and natural resources conservation. He graduated with a bachelor's degree in Forestry from Tribhuvan University, Nepal, a Master's in Forestry from Gottingen University, Germany, and a Ph.D. in Plant and Soil Science from Alabama A&M University. Santosh worked as a planner, extension specialist, forest management officer, and researcher at various agencies in the U.S. and abroad over more than 15 years. Most recently, Santosh was a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Department of Biological and Environmental Sciences, Alabama A& M University, assisting faculties and students in teaching, research, and outreach programs.



Santosh K. Ojha

Santosh enjoy visiting new places, meeting new people, and eating local foods. He is married and has two children.

Erik Palm - Soil Conservation Technician, Bad Axe

It feels good to be back after being away for four years. During my time away I ran my own ecological habitat restoration business and worked for Cardno as a project manager out of their Grand Haven office. I gained invaluable experience in managing large restoration projects all over the Midwest, as well as learning what it takes to design and install many fish and wildlife habitat related practices in a variety of conditions. Prior to that I spent five years with Michigan conservation districts; starting in Lapeer and then transferring to Saginaw. Most of my time was spent working as a MAEAP tech and assisting NRCS, but I did wear "many hats" during that time. I'm excited to be back amongst old friends and working with local landowners again.



Erik Palm

I've been married to my wife Leah for 10 years this upcoming June, and we have two girls; Norah and Emma, who are seven and five, and one more due mid-February. We enjoy being typical out-of-doors loving Michiganders, always up for a canoe trip or snowshoeing adventure! I'm looking forward to working you all.



Conservation at Work Video Series Expanded

Early last year the USDA announced a series of videos titled "Conservation at Work" highlighting different conservation practices. At the time, 15 short videos were posted on different practices.

Since the video series was presented the number of videos has grown to 30. The two-minute videos include practices related to crops, forestry, livestock, soil health, water quality and quantity, and wildlife. The complete collection of videos can be found online at farmers.gov.



American Conservation Consciousness

by Bill Cook, Retired Michigan State Extension Forester/
Biologist

American conservation consciousness was aroused in the middle 1800s, arguably by the likes of George Perkins Marsh and Ralph Waldo Emerson. By the turn of that century, much of the American landscape had been wantonly cutover, wildfires were killing people, soils were eroding into waterways, big game was disappearing, and burgeoning cities had grubby physical environments.

The situation has markedly improved.

The desire to preserve of big game would help spearhead America's response to these crises. Theodore Roosevelt was, perhaps, the nation's most important mover and shaker among those seeking to maintain and restore natural resources, especially forests and wildlife. Roosevelt created over 200 federal lands, covering many millions of acres. He was buddies with men such John Muir, John Burroughs, and Gifford Pinchot.

Forester Aldo Leopold came along in the next round of conservationists with his "Sand County Almanac", wilderness ethic, and the science of game management.

Roosevelt's initiatives did not sit well with big business. He took-on industrial power-brokers such as Frederick Weyerhaeuser, Edward Harriman, John Rockefeller, and Andrew Carnegie. The politics of the day were filled with as much intrigue and skullduggery as at any other time.

Out of this cauldron of conflict, many of today's conservation issues were born.

In the Lake States, in the very early 1900s, the first professional foresters began working on problems of reforestation and wildfire control. Since then, many other societal values have emerged such as sustained timber yield, quality habitat, exotic invasive species, water and soil protection, biodiversity, and climate change.

However, for most private forestowners, the notion of conservation is more restricted to what it means on their own property. The big ideas and sweeping reforms fly past unnoticed or ignored, as more

immediate issues present themselves. However, these "philosophical principles" undergird much of our value system that determines how we respond to these immediate issues, and how the larger public views this robust and fluid term "conservation".

No better example might be found than deer management. When conservation was emerging into the American psyche, deer were scarce. They were victims of rapid and uncontrolled agriculture and industrialization. Groups such as the Boone and

Crockett Club and Audubon Societies were funding programs and research across the nation. Conservation proponents were sometimes murdered for their efforts.

Current deer conservation has not evolved in sync with the explosion of the deer populations over the past several decades. The old ideas don't fit well with the new ecological conditions. Therein lies considerable conflict.

For forestowners, this conflict sometimes comes down to whether or not certain practices are "good" conservation, such as winter deer feeding, hinge-cutting, and the creation of food plots. Researchers, and study after study, show that, at best, these practices are inconsequential to herd dynamics.

However, some landowners "feel" good about spending lots of money on such practices, thinking it's good conservation. And admittedly, deer can be attracted to food within view of a backyard picture window or just in front of a blind in mid-November.

But, that is not population management nor does it consider other woodland or forest values. Nor is it really conservation.

Deer habitat varies across millions of acres in the upper Lake States. Data reference points for most forestowners, and forest visitors, come down to a relative handful of anecdotal local observations of a tiny subset of the deer population. Ebbs and flows of deer in the immediate area are too often erroneously projected across entire landscapes.

Wolf impacts are good examples of the localized ebb and flow perception. In a given year, a hunter



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USDA Encourages Producers to Complete Cash Rents & Leases Survey

Farmers and ranchers may have received a Cash Rents and Leases survey from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS). This survey provides the basis for estimates of the current year's cash rents paid for irrigated cropland, non-irrigated cropland, and permanent pasture.

More than 260,000 producers received the survey. If you received the survey, we encourage you to complete it by June 21. This survey can be completed and returned by mail, over the phone, or at agcounts.usda.gov.

Information from this survey is used as an alternative soil rental rate prior to finalizing new rates each year for the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). Survey responses from as many localities as possible help calculate more accurate rental rates. Completion of the survey ensures cash



rental rates accurately represent your locality.

Survey results will also give you a useful tool in negotiating your rental agreements, and financial planning for your agricultural operation.

In accordance with federal law, survey responses are kept confidential. Survey results will be available in aggregate form only to ensure that no individual producer or operation can be identified. NASS will publish the survey results on August 27 at quickstats.nass.usda.gov/.

If you did not receive a survey, you can sign up at agcounts.usda.gov/static/get-counted.html to receive future surveys, including the crucial 2022 Census of Agriculture.

If you have any questions about this survey, please call 888-424-7828, or visit NASS' [Cash Rents webpage](#).

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American Conservation Consciousness

sitting in a blind might see lots of deer, including a few nice bucks. The next year, news of a wolf pack surfaces and the hunter no longer sees so many deer. Conclusion? The wolves ate all the deer. More likely, however, is that the deer migrated somewhere with fewer wolves.

Regardless of reports from a broader landscape view, which includes an abundance of deer, some of these disenfranchised hunters will maintain that a handful of predators has decimated a herd of hundreds of thousands of deer. Current wolf predation isn't sufficient to significantly reduce deer populations. The math is rather straight-forward.

As public activism in natural resources becomes more diverse, so do the challenges of education and critical thinking. Similar debates can be found over clear-cutting, species introductions, endangered species, visual appearance, invasive removals, and so on. You name it.

In some ways, management is like playing three-dimensional chess, with time, space, and position as axes, with all three changing unpredictably.

More often than not, "good conservation" versus

"bad conservation" is viewed through a single-interest lens at single point in time, when the underlying ecological circumstances are far more complex. Also, "conservation" and "preservation" are improperly expressed as synonyms.

Aldo Leopold offered a possible definition of conservation as "A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise."

In Roosevelt's day, creating public forests, parks, monuments, and wildlife refuges came tagged with a range of fierce arguments, whose fire extends into today. However, that seems rather simple compared to the arguments about how to manage, or steward, those lands, let alone how to best manage the majority of forests and other landscapes that lie largely in private ownership. It's interesting. All the more reason to hire a professional forester.

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Upcoming Events - Upcoming Events

March

- 9 Great Lakes Food Webs, Invasive Species & Fisheries: An interactive Conference, 9:15 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., online via Zoom, for more information go to www.canr.msu.edu/events
- 11 Introduction to Orienteering, 7 p.m. to 8 p.m., online via Zoom, for more information go to www.canr.msu.edu/events
- 11 Virtual Great Lakes Forage & Grazing Conference, 9 a.m. to noon, for more information go to www.canr.msu.edu/events
- 16 Horticulture Trivia Night, 7 p.m. to 7:45 p.m., for more information and to register go to www.canr.msu.edu/events
- 18 Trees 101 Workshop, 7 p.m., online via Zoom, for more information go to midlandcd.org

April

- 8 Backyard Conservation Workshop, 7 p.m., online via Zoom, for more information go to midlandcd.org
- 15 Evenings in the Garden: Christmas Tree Production in Michigan, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30, online event, for more information and to register go to www.canr.msu.edu/events
- 29 Evenings in the Garden: Michigan's Growing Lavender Farms, for more information and to register go to www.canr.msu.edu/events

Conservation District Tree Sales

Spring is around the corner and that means local conservation districts are holding tree and plant sales. Tree and plant sales help fund the important work done by conservation districts and provide quality, often Michigan-raised, plants to landowners.



Not all districts have the same offerings but most have native trees and may also offer fruit trees, shrubs and native flowers or seed. Many districts are already taking orders and supplies may be limited. To find out when your local district is holding their sale and what plants are available visit their [website](#).

Save the Date

June

- 14 Leopold Education Workshop, 9 a.m. to noon, Missaukee Conservation District Outdoor Classroom, 6180 Sanbord Rd. - Lake City, go to www.missaukeecd.org for more information and to register
- 24 Pollinator Partnership Demonstration Sites Tour, Waldron Fen Nature Preserve - Emmet County, on-site or virtual TBD

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