2020 Annual Report

Ottawa Conservation District

OTTAWA CONSERVATION DISTRICT

LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends of Conservation-

With 2020 behind us and 2021 underway, I would like to share with you some of the important work your support has allowed us to complete. As you know this year has presented us with some unprecedented challenges and CoVID 19 did impact us, but our board, staff, and partners have been resilient in the face of adversity. I am excited to highlight this year's work in our FY 2020 Annual Report.

I want to thank the Ottawa County Commissioners and staff for their continued support of our mission by providing the Ottawa Conservation District its operational support. Without their backing and investment, we could not have achieved this year's success. That support not only gives us the ability to achieve our current year's goals but also allows the District the chance to look to the future, and this year we are beginning just that. With the guidance of our board of directors, partners, stakeholders, and the residents of Ottawa County we are engaged in a 5-year strategic planning process that will help guide our work well down the road. Thank you for your continued support of our mission. With your help, we have accomplished much, and we are looking forward to doing more in the years to come.

Megan Boos, Executive Director

WHO WE ARE

The Ottawa Conservation District was founded in 1938 by several landowners concerned with soil degradation that resulted from years of negligent land management. Upon formation, the District set forth goals to remediate soil erosion. Today, the Ottawa Conservation District continues to meet foundational agriculture and forestry goals while also expanding services related to other forms of natural resources conservation.

DISTRICT EMPLOYEES

Megan Boos, *Executive Director*

Lexie Kasper, *Administrative Specialist*

Drew Rayner, *WMCISMA Coordinator*

Sara Bronkema, *MAEAP Technician*

Benjamin Jordan, *Conservation Technician*

Frank Schroyer, *Watershed Technician*

Benjamin Savoie, *District Forester*

Brittney Beavers, *Forest Pest Technician*

Keely Dunham-Adkins, *Forest Pest Technician*

Jacob Grochowski, *Forest Pest Technician*

Erika Horne, *Forest Pest Technician*

NRCS EMPLOYEES

Heather Varboncoeur, *District Conservationist*

Nathan Helms, *Farm Bill Specialist*

Katie Droscha, *Conservation Technician*

Our first beach cleanup crew

OUR PROGRAMS

- **Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP)**
- **Bass River/ Deer Creek Restoration**
- **Upper Sand Creek Restoration**
- **Pigeon River Watershed Management Plan**
- **Deer Creek Growing Environmental Education and Kampus Stewardship (NOAA B-Wet)**
- **Hemlock Woolly Adelgid (HWA) Project**
- **Invasive Species Strike Team (WMCISMA)**
- **Forestry Assistance Program**
- **Native Plant and Tree Fundraisers**
- **Critical Dunes Education**
- **Vegetative Removal Assurance**
- **Road Stream Crossing Inventories**

GET TO KNOW OUR BOARD

The Ottawa Conservation District's Board of Directors is elected to guide the district in its work and represent the interests of county residents. Our Board of Directors: **David Pyle**, Chairman **Todd Bowen**, Vice-Chairman **Douglas Grotenrath**, Treasurer/Secretary **Lester Langeland**, Director **Callie Melton**, Director
Find out what drives them to be a part of this mission!

How do our mission and work motivate you?

David Pyle: To keep God's creation clean and be good stewards of the land and the water.

Todd Bowen: I've dedicated the last 15 years of my career (outside of the Ottawa Conservation District) to natural resource management and feel that the district is the direct connection between the public and agriculture producers who may not have dedicated their lives and/or career to natural resources management. The District may be their only source of education on the importance of water quality, erosion control, invasive species management, and agricultural best management practices.

Douglas Grotenrath: Conservation and the outdoors have always been a part of my life. I hunt, fish, and explore the natural resources of West Michigan. Being a part of the OCD board is a privilege with a great opportunity to learn about different conservation plans from agriculture, invasive species, and waterways to Lake Michigan. Being a part of the OCD team is something to be proud of. Decisions I make today for the district will impact Ottawa County in a positive way for future generations to enjoy.

Lester Langeland: Protecting soil and water and educating producers on the tools available to them.

Callie Melton: The biggest thing that motivates me about our mission is that we are working to help people with the resources they need to address their environmental problems. I love being a part of the work to preserve and protect our local natural resources in the county I grew up in, and in my very own community of Chester Township. I have a deep connection to the water, Lake Michigan, and Crockery Lake, all of which are threatened for different reasons. Being a part of the board gives me the opportunity to contribute to the work of many advocates working to protect them.

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What skills and talents do you bring as a board member?

David Pyle: I wanted to bring a farmer's perspective from the southern part of the county. I have been on many boards and know how to work with people.

Todd Bowen: I have a background in native plants, invasive species management, ecological & habitat restoration that meshes seamlessly with the objectives of the District. I can provide insight and education on the importance of managing our natural resources and help guide the District staff to do the same.

Douglas Grotenrath: From being on the OCD board for two terms I bring the history of the district. As a past business owner and present VP of a business, I am used to making decisions. I am not involved in any of the district programs where a decision I have to make will not benefit me on a personal level. I am the current Treasurer where I contribute my time and opinions to the OCD executive administrator or anyone who asks.

Lester Langeland: Connections with the local ag community, Farm Bureau, and local legislators.

Callie Melton: My background in nonprofit public relations, fundraising, and volunteer recruitment will help propel the Conservation District into the next phase of its development. I'd like to help guide our organization toward finding new ways to engage our community. I am always amazed at how the diversity in our experience as board members and staff complement each other well in guiding our work, and I am always learning something new. I enjoy talking with the staff and offering helpful advice based on my experience.

What goals do you wish to see the district accomplish?

David Pyle: Working with watersheds countywide, like the work with invasives in neighboring counties. Likes to promote the MAEAP and cover crop system. Very happy with seeking grant funds to get things done with the good staff and workforce we currently have.

Todd Bowen: The District has accomplished many goals over the past five years that have elevated them to be recognized as one of the best Districts in the State of Michigan, that not only other Districts look up to but also the State of Michigan itself is impressed with. The Ottawa Conservation District is a leader, and I would love to see them remain the exemplary Conservation District in the State. This is not an easy task and takes the entire staff's hard work and dedication to making this possible.

Douglas Grotenrath: My goal for the district to accomplish would to continue getting grants to keep the district moving forward for the future. Most of all is to keep the employees we have and show them they have a future working at OCD. All the people working at the district make a great team and they are what make this district possible.

Lester Langeland: Countywide assistance and cost-share options for best management practices rather than programs that are watershed-based.

Callie Melton: I would like to help the district achieve new fundraising goals and engage the community in more outward-facing volunteer activities. I want to see the district incorporate more of a nonprofit model into the great work we are already doing.

The 2020 Scrap Tire Collection

Native plants at an Ottawa County park

OCD employees that created goundwater education materials

NATIVE PLANT AND TREE SEEDLING SALES

This year we implemented an appointment pick up system for our sales. The District had never done something like this before and we are so thankful to everyone that supported our sales and our quick changes to the events. Everyone's patience as we navigated these new waters was much appreciated and we were able to hold successful, safe events even in a time of uncertainty.

Our 2020 Tree Sale volunteers

FORESTRY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

The District Forester for Barry, Allegan, and Ottawa Counties implements the Forestry Assistance Program (FAP). FAP assists forest landowners in making management decisions for their woods. The program provides on-site assessments and guidance to landowners and forestry professionals. These services are provided year-round at no cost. In 2020 our District Forester, Ben Savoie, completed 91 site visits and 11 new sites were enrolled in the Qualified Forest Program covering 818 acres. He also completed 66 referrals to public agencies and 98 referrals to private sector industries. He also held or participated in 7 outreach events and 35 media occurrences. The Forestry Assistance Program provides a beneficial economic impact of $203,200.

MICHIGAN AGRICULTURE ENVIRONMENTAL ASSURANCE PROGRAM

Promoting Stewardship
MAEAP
Protecting the Environment

MAEAP 2020	Risk Assessments	Verifications
Farmstead	17	7
Field Crops & Vegetables	5	5
Orchards & Vineyards	6	2
Nurseries	4	0
Greenhouses	3	2
Livestock	5	1
Forests, Wetlands & Habitats	2	1

MAEAP aims to proactively help farms of all sizes and all commodities voluntarily prevent or minimize agricultural pollution risks. In the 2020 fiscal year, 42 risk assessments were completed in Ottawa County, covering 294 acres. Eighteen farming and greenhouse systems were verified, bringing another 1647 acres of cropland to verified status. In total, 72 Risk Reduction Practices were implemented, including improved nutrient and manure management practices, sensitive area identification, and fuel storage safety. This year over $1600 in financial assistance provided for one fuel pad, two backflow prevention devices, two soil tests, five water tests, and four spill kits to help offset costs for MAEAP verification.

MAEAP verified Blackbird Farms

NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

NRCS
Natural Resources Conservation Service

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), a United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) agency, assists farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners to ensure the sustainability of agricultural productions and the protection of natural resources. In 2020, $232,120.83 was spent on cost-share projects that were used to implement best management practices throughout Ottawa County land. That money came from 2 programs, the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). EQIP paid $218,124 to farmers and applied conservation practices to 3,693.7 acres. These practices included 776.6 acres of cover crops, 347.8 acres of Nutrient Management, 198.5 acres of Integrated Pest Management. 3 grass waterways were installed and 2 CNMPs were written. CSP provided $13,997.30, 331.1 acres conservation applied, 3 new CRPs (Conservation Reserve Program) and 3 CRP 10 year renewals. One Agricultural Land Easement (ALE) was also accepted.

West Michigan Cooperative
INVASIVE SPECIES
MANAGEMENT AREA

HEMLOCK WOOLLY ADELGID

The West Michigan CISMA and the four Forest Pest Technicians had a very productive year with the survey and treatment of hemlock woolly adelgid (HWA). Technicians spend the winter months surveying for and collecting data in priority areas in preparation for the summer treatment season. A pause in funding from the State of Michigan caused a delay in progress on priority treatment sites, but after a couple of months, work was able to be resumed. The focus of these surveys and treatments is in the northernmost extent of the range here in Michigan which is in southern Mason and northern Oceana Counties. The first detection in Mason County happened in the spring of 2020 and priorities were shifted to address this site in addition to the sites that were already surveyed prior to this new detection. The flexibility of the CISMA program is critical to ensure we can address the highest priority areas and limit the spread of this forest pest outside of the region. During the survey season, the CISMA surveyed nearly 20,000 trees across 650 acres, and in the treatment season staff was able to treat just over 20,500 trees across 1,227 acres. This is the most that have been treated in a year to date which is exciting progress considering both survey and treatment seasons were impacted by the grant pause and stay at home orders. This project is funded by the Michigan Invasive Species Grant Program and the United States Forest Service Great Lakes Restoration Initiative. We want to thank our funders and partners on this project.

Our Forest Pest Technicians carrying out HWA survey and treatment

STRIKE TEAM

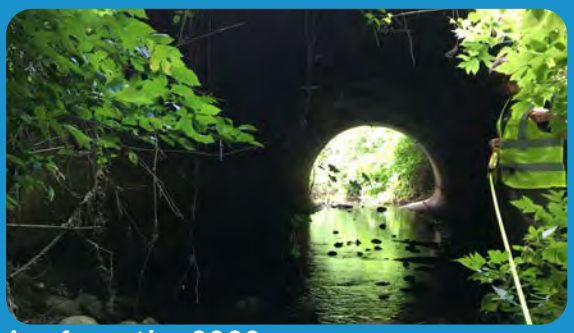
The West Michigan CISMA has strike teams that work out of three Conservation Districts in West Michigan. They work to address invasive plants on both public and private properties. The three offices that host a strike team are in Kent, Muskegon, and Ottawa counties. A pause in funding from the State of Michigan caused a delay in work on priority treatment sites, but work was able to be resumed after a couple of months. During the pause in state funding, services were offered to all treatment sites on a for-hire basis and many landowners opted to receive treatment during this time, ensuring progress was able to continue. Upon the grant funding returning, all work was able to resume and staff was brought on to salvage as much of the season as possible. In total, nearly 600 treatments were completed with 140 of these sites being treatment sites for the United States Forest Service. This totals just over 580 acres of treatment in the shortened season. In addition to this work, a lot of time was spent working to address European frog-bit in the region. This included surveying many water bodies in the region to ensure the complete extent in the region was known and treatment in both the Grand River and Pentwater River. This project is funded by the Michigan Invasive Species Grant Program and the United States Forest Service.
We want to thank our funders and partners.

FEE FOR SERVICE

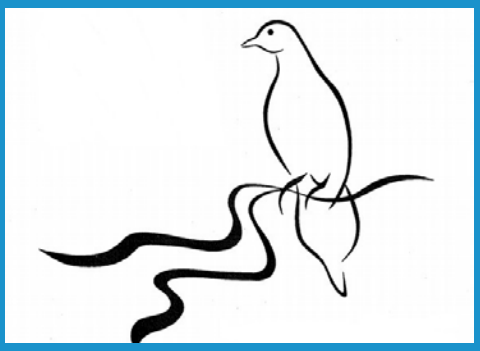
One area of growth for the West Michigan CISMA is in fee for service work. This includes work that is not funded through grants, either due to the priority of the species or its location, but the landowner wants to pay for the work to take place. The goal is to provide an affordable option for landowners to address their invasive species and manage their properties to be healthy and resilient. These treatments are available for both invasive plants and hemlock woolly adelgid and we are hoping to continue to grow this service in the future.

ROAD STREAM CROSSING

This year we wrapped up our Road Stream Crossing Inventories in both the Pigeon River and Sand Creek Watersheds. We collected valuable information on infrastructure and habitat conditions at over 240 different culverts and bridges throughout Ottawa and Kent counites. The information will be shared with partners to help advise future improvements that can be made to our waterways and trout streams. In the future, OCD plans to use the information collected to leverage funds for projects like culvert replacements, streambank stabilizations, and habitat restoration.



Road stream crossing inventories from the 2020 season



PIGEON RIVER WATERSHED MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

Located in central Ottawa County, the Pigeon River flows directly into Lake Michigan through some of the richest agricultural land and unique floodplain forests in our county. Ottawa Conservation District has been working closely with partners to develop a watershed management plan (WMP) for the Pigeon River Watershed. This WMP will be a publicly available reference guide for any information about the watershed. To gather comprehensive information about the watershed, OCD sent out a survey to residents, conducted multiple inventories of the land and water, and monitored E. coli levels to gain a clearer picture of the nonpoint source pollutants which could potentially be affecting surface water quality. More inventories of the Pigeon River's natural resources are scheduled for 2021. All this data will be used alongside historical information to determine how OCD can work to improve conditions in the watershed. We are on track to submit the plan late in 2021. The work completed includes 5 consecutive weeks of E. coli and nutrient sampling at 12 different locations, as well as a Fall Tillage Survey and Spring Residue Survey in the watershed.

DEER CREEK GROWING ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AND KAMPUS STEWARDSHIP (NOAA B-WET)

We have partnered with Groundswell to help create meaningful watershed education experiences (MWEEs) for students in Ottawa County. The purpose of this project is to work with schools in the outdoors and give students the opportunity to develop stewardship projects for local natural areas surrounding issues that matter to them. The curriculum about the Great Lakes and Michigan's many important water resources along with outdoor exploration will ensure the future of our state understands the importance of caring for water.

Annual ryegrass cover crop that was aerially seeded into standing corn

Manure storage facility

Rye cover crop along the Bass Creek

Bass River Deer Creek Restoration

BASS RIVER/ DEER CREEK RESTORATION

This project is dedicated to reducing nutrients, sediment, and E. Coli levels in the Bass River and Deer Creek watersheds by providing technical assistance and cost-share funding for best management practices.

The Ottawa Conservation District is currently operating a 319 grant from the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) to accomplish these goals.

In 2020 this grant allowed for cost-share assistance in 6 septic system replacements and over 4300 acres of cover crops and reduced tillage.

It also allowed us to provide cost-share for one manure storage facility, replacing or improving two culverts, and assisting 23 individual farmers with our available programs.

VOLUNTEER

This year we had 36 volunteers outside of our organization join us over 6 events! We are grateful for the volunteers that helped us at our Annual Tree Sale, our Native Plant Sales, our beach cleanups, our highway cleanups, and our scrap tire collection event.

Due to everyone's hard work, we cleaned up 119 pounds of trash off of our local beaches, countless bags of trash along the side of the highway, and we collected almost 2000 tires to be recycled.

We're thankful that everyone participated in social distancing and safety guidelines and we were able to get out there and care for our beautiful county!

The 2020 Scrap Tire Collection

A summer cleanup of an Ottawa County beach

CRITICAL DUNES/VEGETATIVE REMOVAL ASSURANCE

The District can provide general information on Michigan's Critical Dunes. programs for schools and organizations can be provided, tailoring length and content to the appropriate audience. We encourage the public to contact the District if they would like to know more about this highly valuable habitat.

If an Ottawa County resident is building within a Critical Dune area, the District can offer assistance in completing a Vegetation Removal Assurance (VRA) during the required permit process with EGLE. The purpose of this is to determine how vegetation will be impacted during construction, and how best to re-stabilize the area after the project is finished.

With our knowledge of critical dunes, native plants, and erosion prevention, District staff can provide this service to the public for a fee.

14 VRA's were completed by the District in 2020.

Critical Dunes

Information and Education

2020-2021 FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

Revenue (By source type) *Do not list individual grants. Do not list Activity numbers. All Revenue must be in one of the following categories.*	
State Funds	$491,512.73
Federal Funds	$895,858.41
Contributions from Local Units	$80,000.00
Charges for Services	$40,449.37
Interest and Rentals	
Tree Sales	$36,000.00
Local Grant Funds	$ -
Other Revenue	
Total Revenue	**$1,544,820.51**
Expenditures (By Activity) *Use required activity numbers below and discretionary activity numbers for other activities. Include only those activities which apply to your District.*	
281 Operations	$153,000.00
294 Reforestation	$16,000.00
282 MAEAP Grant	$76,000.00
291 Vegetation Management	$3,500.00
299 Bass/Deer 319 Grant	$364,771.13
296 Critical Dune Education	$1,000.00
Vegetation Removal Assurance	$2,000.00
288 MISGP D-18 FB	$36,714.45
288 MISGP D-19	$40,213.40
288 MISGP C-18	$90,000.00
289 MISGP HWA T	$119,806.22
289 MISGP HWA S	$89,477.66
USFS Invasive Species	$11,040.20
Good neighbor authority	$22,500.00
GLRI HWA	$137,568.74
Scrap Tire	$500.00
Fee for service Invasive (Non-cost share)	$5,000.00
Suggested Service Costs (Grant cost share)	$35,000.00
Pigeon River 319	$113,369.61
NOAA B-WET	$14,399.47
Trash Free Waters	$2,500.00
Other Expenses	$60,000.00
Total Expenditures	**$1,394,360.88**
Budget Balance	**$ 150,459.63**
Beginning Fund Balance *(Required)*	**$87,360.58**
Ending Fund Balance *(Required)*	**$237,820.21**

Native flowers at an Ottawa County park

Invasive species work for European frog-bit

Japanese Knotweed treatments

GET INVOLVED

Our board meetings take place on the first Tuesday of every month and are open to the public. Depending on the state guidelines in place, they will either be held virtually or at 16731 Ferris St. Grand Haven, MI 49417. Visit our website at ottawacd.org to find the meeting details every month.

On our website or FaceBook page, you will find information on upcoming volunteer events. We offer a variety of activities for individuals, families, or organizations.

(616) 842-5852 Ext.5 | www.ottawacd.org
16731 Ferris St. Grand Haven, MI 49417