OTTAWA CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Your Land, Your Water, Your Michigan

OTTAWA CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Agenda

Regular Meeting, USDA Service Center, Grand Haven MI
6 pm on Tuesday, Oct. 8th, 2024

CALL TO ORDER - *6:03 PM*

ROLL CALL - *Rivka Hodgkinson, Doug Grotenrath, and Matt Hehl present, Tim VanDyke is not present, Becky Huttenga arrived at 6:37 PM*

REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES - ***Rivka motioned to approve the September meeting Minutes, Doug seconded the motion, All voted Aye, September meeting minutes were officially approved.***

APPROVAL OF AGENDA - ***Rivka motioned to approve the October agenda, Doug seconded the motion, All voted Aye, October Agenda was officially approved.***

PUBLIC COMMENT - *none*

STAFF 2 MIN HIGHLIGHTS - *Sarah Bowman provided an update that she has been working with a lot of customers on finalizing pollinator mixes for fall planting and is currently planning a Septic System Workshop for October 16th. Meghan Bannick introduced herself as the new RCPP Manager and gave a brief background on her experience to the board.*

QUESTIONS ON BOARD REPORTS - *None*

Murielle Garbarinos- CISMA Coordinator – Report
Will Latham- Invasive Species Specialist - Report
Caryn Dawson- MAEAP Technician – Report
Morgan Anderson- Produce Safety Technician - Report
Forest Pest Technicians - Report

Ben Jordan, Watershed Programs Coordinator - Report
Sarah Bowman, Watershed & Conservation Specialist - Report
Alex Svoboda, RCPP Project Manager - Report
Tracey Weatherwax, Soil Conservation Technician - Report
Ben Savoie, Forester - Report
MDARD - Report

PARTNER UPDATES - *Jack Knorek was present. His main update from MDARD was that the MAEAP program is undergoing significant changes, the program is being renamed to the Conservation Technical Assistance Program (CTAP). Technicians will be expected to promote regenerative agriculture practices as part of their work.*

Executive Director (ED) Report - Natalie Bekins - *Natalie reported that it was yet another busy month. Some highlights include meeting with Paul Sachs (Director of Ottawa County Department of Strategic Impact) to go over OCD's groundwater workplan which was revamped to be more clear and quantitative on what services OCD is providing for the funding being received. She also hired a new RCPP Manager to replace Alex Svoboda and has been working on new staff onboarding. She also worked with the staff to review OCD's FY2025 annual plan of work which helped the staff review each program's priorities for the year. She carried out a lot of end of fiscal year quarterly reporting and has been working with the auditor on financials.*

Monthly Program Highlight: FAP FORESTRY PROGRAM - *Ben Savoie highlighted the work he has completed over the last year. Ben is the District Forester who covers Ottawa, Barry, and Allegan Counties. His major goal is to complete site visits for the Qualified Forest Program which leads into many other potential resources. His goal was 80 site visits which was reached and they visited just about 4,000 acres of forest land. About 500 acres of forestland was enrolled into the program (goal of enrollment is 2,000 acres). They recently created postcards that were sent out in all three counties, focusing on areas in Allegan and Barry where the program is more eligible for landowners. They've been working on a spongy month egg nest survey in Barry County and they've been utilizing seasonal staff to count old and new egg sacs to compare populations year to year to predict the potential population for future years and give recommendations on whether or not spraying is needed. Ben's economic impact across his service area and the work he completes added up to $750,000, with an approximate impact of $250,000 for Ottawa County specifically. His grant was recently re-signed for another year.*

- *Matt asked about options for treating Oak Wilt. Ben said there's no cure for it, but you can treat it from spreading to nearby trees. This usually requires a trench to break up the root paths between oak trees, which is disruptive and expensive but effective. A less effective but less disruptive option is a chemical barrier injected into trees with a fungicide to prevent the tree from being infected by the oak wilt. There are also some experimental options with mixed results.*
- *Rivka asked if there are any areas of need or things that aren't being covered by his program right now. Ben said that in Ottawa county there are less privately owned forest than in Allegan and Barry Counties, so his main issue is needing to be better at selling his program to those who it could pertain to. If we can help him to expand his reach in Ottawa County then that would be helpful.*

- **Human Resource: -** (H/R Committee)
  - HR Committee Meeting (REPORT) - *Rivka gave the HR committee Report - They worked with Natalie to interview and hire the new RCPP manager, completed Natalie's ED annual review where they went over strengths and weaknesses of the first year and discussed professional development opportunities. Rivka stated that as MACD Executive Director, she sees District Managers all over the state and remarked that Natalie is definitely one of the top performing Executive Directors. The HR Committee has also been working on updating employee policies due to changing state and federal laws. Both Becky and Rivka have been able to utilize their employment experience with Ottawa County and MACD to update policies.*

  - MAEAP Technician TItle Change (VOTE) - ***Rivka motioned to update the MAEAP Technician title to Conservation Technical Assistance Coordinator, Doug supported the motion.*** *Discussion - The Ottawa staff person may be required to cover the southern part of Muskegon due to changes in the MAEAP program and program boundaries. However the final grant contract has not been received yet, so this may change.* ***All voted Aye, Motion to update title passed.***

  - Policy
    - Compensatory Time (VOTE) - ***Rivka motioned to adopt the new compensatory time policy, Doug supported the motion.*** *Discussion - This policy states that staff who collect comp time for working over 40 hours in a week now have up to two*

pay periods to use the time instead of having to use it within the same pay period. ***All voted Aye, Motion to update the compensatory time policy passes.***

- **Financial:** (Finance Committee) - ***Becky Huttenga arrived at this point.***
  - Finance Committee Meeting (REPORT) - *Doug gave the Finance Committee Report - They met with the auditor (OCD currently uses Lake Michigan CPA) as they need to clean up some things from FY24 to ensure we are moving into the new fiscal year with updated books. They are planning to hire a CPA to help with keeping up with financials moving forward. They also discussed CDEM dues that were voted on last year which pays for OCD's staff ability to participate in MACD Health Benefits, he stated they plan to keep moving forward with paying dues this year and it does not require another vote. They have also continued to discuss MERS retirement benefits and plan to learn more from a MERS representative.*

  - August and September bank reconciliations and bill payment: *See the financial packet for our profit & loss, balance sheet, bill list, and account reconciliations.* (VOTE) - ***Rivka motioned to pay the bills as presented, Becky supported the motion.*** *Discussion - Rivka asked if there was anything out of the ordinary, only item noted was there is a check written to pay for pesticide but is is not being paid until the first week of November. Rivka pointed out that a typo with mailchimp and shopify still needed to be fixed and Natalie made a note of it. Becky had some suggestions on financial packet structure but she wanted to share later.* ***All voted Aye on the motion, Motion to pay the bills as presented passed.***

  - Cash Flow Forecast (DISCUSSION) - *Natalie stated that the quarter closed out smoothly, reimbursements were received on time and some early.*

- **Operations:**
  - New Used Vehicle (UPDATE) - *OCD received just over $6,000 from our truck fundraiser. We are planning to move forward with a dealership and have given a description of what we're looking for to a few of them. The lead on the staff vehicle maintenance committee has also been checking sites and facebook marketplace for leads on a vehicle. We are currently looking for a used larger car and/or hatchback that will work with our budget. We will be moving the money from insurance and the fundraiser into the second savings account to ensure it doesn't get used for something else.*

  - Native Plant Sale (UPDATE) - *The fall native plant sale was hosted on October 5th at Hemlock Crossing nature center. Natalie and Annalease weren't able to get a profit and loss completed in time for the board meeting, but they sold 1201 plants and 21 shrubs. The event was steadily busy, but is always less busy than spring. Everything went very smoothly!*

  - Tree Sale Date (UPDATE) April 18th, 2025 - *Date of the event has been set to April 18th, 2025. Trees have been ordered. Staff tree committee has a plan in place for completing tasks leading up to the sale. Preorders will likely go live in February.*

- Determine FY25 Board Meeting Schedule (VOTE) - ***Rivka motioned to approve the FY25 Board Meeting schedule (2nd Tuesday of each month at 6 PM), Doug supported the motion.*** *Discussion - Becky wondered if there was an opportunity to tighten up the schedule closer to the work day to help with staff attendance, but is open to keeping the schedule the way it currently is. Natalie stated that other staff had mentioned that other boards have met during the day to benefit the relationship between board and staff. Becky said sometimes there are a lot of local unit meetings on the second Tuesday, but that changes often. Becky asked if 5 or 5:30 pm would work better. Doug said he was usually here early anyways. Becky wondered if they could potentially meet earlier or during the day in the Winter months. Matt said that could potentially work but could lead to confusion as to which months are during the day or evening. Discussion lead ultimately to keeping the schedule the same.* ***All voted Aye, motion passed to approve the FY25 Board Meeting Schedule of the 2nd Tuesday of the month at 6 PM.***

- MACD
  - ~~Membership Tier (VOTE)~~ *Staff is still gathering information, this agenda item will move to next month.*

  - Fall Conference (DISCUSSION) - *Fall MACD conference is at the beginning of November (November 6 - 8). ED and MAEAP Technician are required to attend. Natalie has estimated the costs for 5 staff to attend the conference to be approximately $3,841, about $200-$300 of which will come out of District funding for dinners. The rest of the cost will be covered under grants. Ben Jordan and Sarah Bowman are presenting on some water quality topics. Natalie mentions that the board had previously given her the ability to approve training opportunities for the staff, but the board is required to approve training opportunities for the ED.* ***Doug motions to approve Natalie to attend, Becky supports the motion, Bekcy and Doug say Aye, Rivka abstains due to conflict of interest as the MACD ED, Motion to allow Natalie to attend the Fall MACD conference passes.***

- **Grants:** *No questions on Grants at this time.*
  - **Preparing:**
    - CISMA
      - Michigan Invasive Species Grant Program - Each CISMA is eligible for $70,000 in annual funding to provide education and technical assistance to landowners. There is up to $40,000 in competitive funding available for the survey and treatment of high-priority invasive species.
    - NACD -Technical Assistance
      - Supports the wages for our Soil Conservation Technician to assist NRCS with CSP, EQUIP, and CODA. Requesting $72,945.66.
  - **Pending:**
    - CISMA Funding

- Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (CWMA)- This grant will continue the surveillance and treatment of European Frog Bit in the West Michigan area as well as increase outreach and education to youth about the spread of this species. Requesting $82,965.

- Watershed program
  - Midwest Glacial Lakes Lake Conservation Grant - Two-year grant requesting funds to support a shoreline naturalization technical assistance and cost-share program with accompanying water quality monitoring for Spring Lake and Crockery Lake. Request for $99,673.48 to support watershed staff, monitoring supplies, and landowner cost share.
- OTHER
  - NFWF (National Fish and Wildlife Foundation) Conservation Partners Program - grant intended to increase the amount of regenerative agriculture principles and conservation practices on private working lands in priority geographic areas, which includes the Great Lakes Basin through FarmBill programs. Will sustain two existing positions for 3 years. Requesting just over $300,000.

- **Executing:**
  - Landscape Scale Restoration - for Hemlock woolly adelgid treatment in Oceana, Muskegon, Ottawa, and Allegan. Fund implementation of HWA management workshops in counties from Allegan to Grand Traverse Counties. Facilitate the installation of browse exclosures to encourage natural regeneration. The request is for $400,000.
  - EGLE 319 NPS for Sand Creek & Crockery Creek (Phase 2) - Two year grant to continue the Sand Creek & Crockery Creek project. Request for nearly $600,000 in funding for wages, technical assistance, septic & agricultural best management practices.
  - MDARD Grants - MAEAP ($78,500), Produce Safety ($86,109), Operations ($40,000)

- **Not received:**
  - N/A

Late Motion: *The approval needed to sign the new RCPP Manager's work agreement was missed earlier in the meeting.* ***Becky Huttenga moved to authorize the Board Chair to sign Meghan Banninks / New RCPP Manager's work agreement. Rivka supported the motion.*** *Discussion- Rivka said welcome to the team!* ***All voted aye, motion passed to sign the new work agreement for Meghan Bannink and the work agreement is signed.***

Board updates: (2 minutes)

Hehl- *No updates.* VanDyke - *Not Present.* Grotenrath - *No updates.* Huttenga - *Becky is wondering whether the monthly financial statements packet can be restructured to reduce the amount of paper wasted and reduce the amount of information shared. She would like to rely on the financial committee to review the financials in detail and then just ensure the rest of the board has the info they need. She would like to bring it up as a discussion item on a later meeting so Natalie can ensure all expectations are met. They are now planning to review the appropriations and operations budgets quarterly during board meetings to ensure goals are*

being met. Matt suggested that Becky share her ideas with Natalie and Natalie will bring suggestions to the finance committee to see where they can shorten. Hodgkinson - *Rivka asks pumpkin pie or apple crisp for the next meeting? Matt says pumpkin!*

CORRESPONDENCE: N/A

PA 116:

- Olive Township - *Reviewed, Becky Huttenga stated that these PA116's don't need to be on the board agenda in the future, we can just send a reviewed letter, and they don't need to be approved by the board.*

ADJOURN – next meeting: November 12th, 2024, 6 PM - *Adjourned at 7:10 pm*