Note from the Director

Today, as I reflect on where we’ve been and where we’re going, I see tangible ways that we have impacted the community:

More and more farms have taken measures to protect ground and surface water through the Michigan Agricultural Environmental Assurance Program! We work closely with our partner, the Natural Resources Conservation Service to implement soil and water conservation practices on private lands. We’ve led countless guided field trips to get people out learning about the incredible natural features of Oceana County. We’ve killed off large infestations of invasive species that threaten our rivers, lakes and forests. We’ve recycled a gazillion pounds of waste, electronics, and scrap tires to help protect our natural resources from pollution. We’ve distributed hundreds of thousands of tree seedlings to be planted over the years, and created large tracts of pollinator habitat.

A view from a broader perspective allows me to look for other ways we can impact our community. I see opportunities to do a better job of reaching the youth in our county. I get excited thinking about how we can offer opportunities for children to connect with nature so that they can grasp the value that is right in our backyards in Oceana County.

Allow me to share what it was like through the lens of one of these children who attended our first annual Nature Ranger Summer Day Camp at Gales Pond County Park in August.

“Mom, I got to be a “nature ranger” today. When I first got to camp, there was an eagle flying over the pond. It was huge! Did you know they have an eight-foot wing span? I learned that amphibians are slimy and reptiles are scaly, but both have backbones. Then we went on a nature hike and you wouldn’t believe how many animals are living there. We looked under logs and found salamanders, we crouched down by the water and saw a frog, we looked across the stream and saw a water snake wrapped around a branch, we found a pile of garter snakes warming themselves in the sun, and even saw a big snapping turtle! It was so fun getting wet and dirty!”

The opportunity to have these experiences is more important now than ever. As kids get sucked into electronics, there is a growing concern that they’re losing a connection to the natural world. Research has shown that spending time in nature improves cognitive performance and test scores, reduces obesity and stress, and leads them down a path of curiosity. Also, it’s arguably the single most important factor that inspires them to care for our natural world.

So as I look to the future, I become increasingly aware of the conservation district’s role in this community. Not only will we continue to be actively engaged in conservation, stewardship, and sustainable use of our local lands and water, but we need to impact and empower future generations to do the same.

Suzie Knoll
Suzie Knoll, Executive Director
Suzie joined the District in 2014. She comes with degrees in biology and psychology and has experience doing fieldwork relating to avian research and ecological restoration. Her office management, organizational skills and drive to succeed give her the opportunity to lead the District in fulfilling its mission and expanding programs and services of the District.

Adam Chandler, Conservation Technician
With a degree in Natural Resource Management from Grand Valley State University and a GIS certification, Adam has been with the District since January of 2016. Adam works primarily with the Natural Resource Conservation Service staff in our office to provide assistance to landowners who wish to address their natural resource concerns.

Rod Denning, District Forester
Rod joined our team in 2018. Rod not only comes with over 12 years of forestry experience, he is also a GIS specialist and certified arborist. We are thrilled to have him on board to provide education, outreach, and one-on-one forest management assistance to forest owners in Oceana, Muskegon and Newaygo Counties.

Lynda Herremans, MAEAP Technician
After receiving a B.S. in Wildlife Biology from MSU, she has worked as a Wildlife, Conservation and Energy Technician, Soil Conservationist, Executive Director at Mason-Lake Conservation District, and now as Oceana’s MAEAP Technician since 2011. Lynda loves being able to combine her passion for agriculture and conservation of natural resources as a MAEAP Technician.

Rebecca Miller, Education Coordinator
Rebecca is currently enrolled in Oregon State University’s Master of Natural Resources online program and has been hired to work on expanding environmental educational programming in Oceana County. Rebecca comes with experience as an interpretative naturalist and will be getting trained to teach several environmental education curricula.

Mark Kelly, USDA-NRCS District Conservationist
Mark has been the District Conservationist with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Oceana County since 1991. He graduated from the University of Illinois with an agronomy degree (crops and soils) and has been with USDA for over 40 years working in Illinois before transferring to Michigan.

Dayna McCoy, USDA-NRCS Soil Conservationist
Dayna grew up near metro Detroit in Clarkston and moved to west Michigan to attend GVSU. With a degree in Natural Resource Management, she has been working with the NRCS in Shelby since 2011 to help people address natural resource concerns on their property and to utilize Farm Bill programs to do so.
2018 Accomplishments at a Glance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MAEAP verifications (new or re-verified in 2018)</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forest landowners assisted</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acres enrolled into Qualified Forest Program</td>
<td>2,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USDA funds farmers received for conservation/restoration</td>
<td>$740,152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tree/shrub seedlings sold</td>
<td>23,525</td>
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<tr>
<td>Culms of beach grass sold</td>
<td>10,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acres of pollinator habitat planted</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acres planted with no-till grain drill</td>
<td>365</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People attended educational field trips and events</td>
<td>1,920</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acres of invasive species treated (Japanese knotweed, Phragmites)</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acres of forest pests treated (Hemlock Woolly Adelgid)</td>
<td>420</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pounds of hazardous waste collected</td>
<td>30,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plastic ag containers collected and recycled</td>
<td>6,800</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scrap tires collected and recycled</td>
<td>3,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wells tested for nitrates</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarships awarded</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Staff and volunteers collected 3,000 tires to be recycled.
MAEAP’s comprehensive, voluntary, proactive program is designed to reduce farmers’ legal and environmental risks through a three-phase process: 1) education; 2) farm-specific risk assessment and practice implementation; and 3) on-farm verification that ensures the farmer has implemented environmentally-sound practices. Thirteen farmers successfully completed all phases during the past year adding 7 new verifications and 27 re-verifications. This brings Oceana County’s total verification number to 143 with 136 of those having up-to-date verification status. Congratulations to the following farms reaching additional or new verifications during the past fiscal year:

Many more farms received assistance related to emergency planning, water use reports, water withdrawal assessment tool, no-till drill use, spill kits, pesticide jug recycling and more by the MAEAP Technician. Since the first phase of the program is education, much effort goes into providing these opportunities to growers. The following outreach activities took place in FY2018:

- MAEAP Phase I/Grower’s Meeting in Scottville for Mason, Lake, Oceana & Manistee growers
- MAEAP presentation and display at Asparagus Day
- Oceana Ag Banquet - Banquet included a MAEAP Display and a MAEAP award presentation
- MSUE Oceana Horticultural Meeting - MAEAP presentation
- Westshore FFA presentations to 25 students/Scholarship presentations at FFA Banquet
- Earth Day presentation at Hart BioPure
- MAEAP Phase I/Presentation at Forestry Workshop for forestry landowners
- Free nitrate screening for Oceana County residents (60 wells tested)
- MAEAP Technician coordinated the collection and recycling of 6,800 agricultural containers
- MAEAP Technician & CD Forester hosted state-wide MAEAP Technician training on Forest, Wetland & Habitat Verification
- Claybanks & Benona Township Farm Tour in August and highlighted Farm Bill & MAEAP practices as well as showcased the diversity of Oceana agriculture (record 105 in attendance)
- News articles in the Oceana Conservation District newsletters (2) and press releases in Oceana’s Herald Journal (3)

For those wishing to get started with the MAEAP process, please contact Oceana MAEAP Technician Lynda Herremans at (231) 861-5600 x 3006.
For 2018, the Oceana Conservation District celebrated its sixth year of providing a District Forester to work with the Forestry Assistance Program (FAP). The program is funded by a grant from the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. Since 2013, the program has provided a total of 478 site visits throughout the three county service area (Oceana, Newaygo, and Muskegon) to interested landowners. In 2018, 99 site visits, covering 7,013 acres were conducted across the region.

During this time numerous presentations and workshops were given on forest ecology, forest health - insect and disease issues, forest management, the Qualified Forest Program, and having a timber sale. Also, numerous media outreach articles have been written covering topics such as the Emerald ash borer, the forestry assistance program, tree planting, improving wildlife habitat, and firewood cutting just to name a few. Also, the foresters have worked with local schools and youth groups to help bring environmental education to the classroom.

The FAP provides landowners a free site visit, assistance, and recommendations about anything forestry related. What is the status of my woodlot? Is it a good time to harvest trees? Do I have good habitat for deer? What kind of programs can I utilize? Do I have any insect and disease issues in my woodlot? These questions and many others can be answered with the help of your District Forester. The program also uses a referral service to help landowners connect with service providers that can help them with getting a forest management plan written, or to administer a timber sale.

A major focus of the FAP, is the promotion of the Qualified Forest Program (QFP). In 2018, 21 landowners were interested in signing up for the QFP. The program provides a property tax exemption for private landowners who actively manage their woodlots for the production of forest products. The goal of the program is to promote good forest stewardship of local woodlots, and to provide forest products to Michigan’s forest products industry.

If you’re a forest landowner and are interested in services that the Forestry Assistance Program offers, please contact District Forester, Rod Denning at 616-920-9775, or rod.denning@macd.org.
Oceana County is one of seven counties of the West Michigan Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area (West Michigan CISMA). Numerous agencies and organizations, including conservation districts in these counties, serve as partners and work together to obtain grants for invasive species work. Oceana Conservation District works closely with Ottawa Conservation District and Muskegon Conservation District to implement invasive species treatments in Oceana County.

In Oceana County, work thus far has been focused on two terrestrial plant species (Japanese knotweed and Phragmites) and one forest pest (hemlock woolly adelgid).

Japanese knotweed and Phragmites treatments were conducted on 117 sites in Oceana County (68 sites on private lands and 49 on U.S. Forest Service land), covering 127 acres (6 acres on private lands and 121 acres on U.S. Forest Service land).

A large effort is underway in West Michigan to survey and treat a forest pest called Hemlock Woolly Adelgid. Our CISMA has received a significant amount of grant funds to focus efforts on halting the spread of the pest north of Oceana County. Crews surveyed 14,305 trees over 680 acres in Oceana County, and treated 6,988 trees over 420 acres in 2018.
We are committed to educating our residents about the ecologic wonders and natural resources within our county. With the help of grant funds and donations, we were able to stand firm to this commitment and expand our educational programming in 2018! We hired an education coordinator who is meeting with local schools to assess how we can help bring environmental education into the classroom. Classroom curriculum will focus on Michigan Department of Education state standards incorporated into fun, environmentally-focused activities. Our goal is to assist teachers by supplementing their curriculum and featuring the natural resources of Oceana County.

1st Annual Nature Ranger Day Camp
Our first annual Nature Ranger Day Camp was a hit with young outdoor explorers. The half-day sessions included fun, hands-on activities and experiential learning about forests, wetlands, wildlife and more. Open to all children ages 5-10, the camp highlights flora and fauna of county parks and emphasizes activities that kids can continue on their own.

2018 6th Grade Field Trip
In September, Oceana Conservation District hosted its 45th annual 6th grade field trip for 230 students from Hart, Shelby, and Walkerville schools. The warm, sunny Friday offered perfect weather for students to rotate through five stations learning about the flora and fauna of Oceana County, water quality, soil conservation and invasive species. First, the macroinvertebrate station engaged students in a pond study by teaching them how to identify macroinvertebrates and find out which species are tolerant and intolerant of environmental stress. At the wildlife station, students learned about animal adaptations by getting hands-on with a variety of furs, skulls, and feathers. Next, a station located in the middle of the cattail marsh taught students about invasive species with a live sea lamprey on display and discussion about how they harm our environment. The students were then led on an educational hike through the woods at Gales Pond while learning about trees and unique natural features. Lastly, a station on soil conservation got the students thinking about the importance of soil and how conservation practices are used to prevent soil erosion and discuss farmland preservation.

3rd Grade Arbor Day Tree Seedling Distribution
For Arbor Day, district staff visited classrooms at Hart, Shelby, Pentwater, New Era, and Walkerville schools to hand out white pine seedlings to every 3rd grader in Oceana County. Students learned about the meaning of Arbor Day, the importance of trees, sustainable forestry, and how to properly plant and care for their tree. A total of 264 white pine seedlings were distributed! This program was reinvigorated in 2017 and the district looks forward to continuing the Arbor Day tree seedling handout annually.
Farm bills have long been a financial tool to help America’s farmers. The first farm bill was passed by Congress under Franklin D. Roosevelt, as the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933. It was created during the Great Depression when farmers were struggling with low prices caused by an excess crop supply. The Act allowed the government to purchase surplus livestock and pay subsidies to farmers for not farming all their land, which successfully increased crop prices. Since then, farm bills have been updated every 5 years, and the programs offered are constantly changing. Over the years, farm bills have included policies on commodity crop subsidies, trade, rural development, farm credit, conservation, agricultural research, food and nutrition programs, crop insurance, and more. Here at the USDA Service Center in Shelby, the NRCS works primarily with the conservation component of the current farm bill.

Fast forward to the Agricultural Act of 2014 (also known as Farm Bill 2014), which was active from February 7, 2014 to December 20, 2018. The NRCS works with conservation programs funded under the Farm Bill to provide benefits to both agricultural production and environmental protection. Over these past 5 years in Oceana County alone, the NRCS had contracts with 71 different landowners to improve conservation practices on their operations, covering around 19,000 acres. As an incentive to complete conservation practices, financial assistance was provided totaling approximately $2.5 million just for the practices completed in the county.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), an agency in the United States Department of Agriculture, works with private landowners to install or implement conservation practices on their land. We are an agency of resource professionals (foresters, biologists, engineers, planners, etc.) who partner and work directly with and through your local conservation district. All assistance with NRCS is voluntary. You, as the landowner, can start and stop your interaction with NRCS at any time. Our one and only job is to educate and assist landowners with installing conservation practices. NRCS has been working with farmers, ranchers, rural landowners and conservation districts since 1935.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)
For agricultural producers, this program provides financial and technical assistance to address natural resource concerns relating to soil, water, air, plants, animals, and sometimes even humans on their land.

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)
This program provides financial assistance for farmers and ranchers to assist in maintaining the conservation practices already implemented and to challenge them to try new conservation techniques such as soil testing, scouting for pests, or using nutrient management.

Wetland Reserve Easement (WRE)
Designed to restore wetlands that were drained or manipulated in any way for agricultural production. A wetland restoration project involves many parties and can take years to complete.
BEGINNING BALANCE .......................................................... $107,187

REVENUES
State Grants .......................................................................... $207,525
Local Funding & Grants......................................................... $21,000
Charge for Services ................................................................. $8,444
Sale of Goods ........................................................................ $69,416
Rentals & Interest .................................................................. $3,914
Other Revenue ......................................................................... $43,067
TOTAL REVENUES ............................................................ $353,366

EXPENDITURES
District Operations ................................................................. $275,386
Plant Materials ....................................................................... $45,691
Education/Outreach ................................................................. $2,080
Recycling Programs ................................................................. $7,652
Scholarship Program ................................................................. $3,000
TOTAL EXPENDITURES ......................................................... $333,809

CONTRIBUTION TO FUND BALANCE ............................... $19,557

ENDING BALANCE ............................................................. $126,744