

# Conservation District's Partners

Conservation Districts partner with many local and statewide groups and organizations. But the two main agencies that assist with Conservation Districts are the **Michigan Department of Agriculture** and the **USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service**. There are also three main non-profit organizations that assist Districts: the **Michigan Association of Conservation Districts**, the **Michigan Association of Conservation District Employees**, and the **National Association of Conservation Districts**.

## What is the Conservation District's Relationship with the Michigan Department of Agriculture?

The Conservation District Act provides for the Michigan Department of Agriculture to coordinate programs of the various Conservation Districts, assist in planning local programs, assure that each District is operated and maintained as an entity of government and, administer state allocated grants to Conservation Districts. Local District administration assistance and program coordination functions are carried out by the Environmental Stewardship Division staff of the Michigan Department of Agriculture.

Under this arrangement, the Conservation District:

### Must

- ◆ Submit an annual audit report, a copy of its annual report, and its regular and special meeting minutes to the Michigan Department of Agriculture.
- ◆ Notify the Michigan Department of Agriculture of the time and place of the annual meeting and method of election; submit director election certificate and oaths of office.
- ◆ Upon request, submit other documents and information necessary to maintain the District as an entity of government.

### May

- ◆ Request assistance in planning and implementing its program.

In turn, the Michigan Department of Agriculture:

### Must

- ◆ Arrange for cooperation and financial and other assistance to Districts from state and federal governmental units.
- ◆ Offer assistance to local Districts in carrying out their statutory responsibilities.
- ◆ Approve and coordinate local programs.
- ◆ Disseminate soil and water conservation information.
- ◆ Certify election results and audit reports.

- ◆ Conduct and supervise procedures which assure that each organized Conservation District is maintained and operated as an entity of government as provided in Act 297, the Open Meetings Act.
- ◆ Keep a file of all legal documents required to maintain each District as an entity of government.

### May

- ◆ Require such documents and reports as needed to assist in coordinating all conservation programs.
- ◆ Develop printed materials to assist Districts in promoting soil and water conservation among the general public.
- ◆ Develop and conduct training programs for directors and staff to assist in effective District program development and implementation.

### **Why is the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Involved in Local Conservation District Programs?**

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service is a federal agency with the very general goal of natural resource conservation. Primarily working on farm resource conservation, the NRCS also deals with other private and public resources.

A memorandum of understanding was executed between the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the District at the time of its organization. This agreement allows the Conservation District to utilize the technical service of the Natural Resource Conservation Service. Most Districts have a Natural Resource Conservation Service employee called the NRCS Conservationist. In general, the agreement says that the Natural Resource Conservation Service:

1. Will assign technical personnel to the District.
2. Will provide assistance in accordance with District's annual plan.
3. Will consult with Districts in advance when personnel and/or assistance changes are to be made.
4. Will notify Districts in advance when changes are to be made.
5. May provide office facilities.

For more information on NRCS functions and programs check out their website at: [www.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov).

### **What is the Role of the Michigan Association of Conservation Districts (MACD)**

The Michigan Association of Conservation Districts (MACD) is a non-governmental, non-profit organization established to represent and provide services to Michigan's 82 Conservation Districts. It was organized in 1940 as Michigan Soil Conservation Districts Incorporated, which became the Michigan Association of Conservation Districts in 1978.

The Michigan Association of Conservation Districts represents its members at the state level by working with legislators, cooperating agencies, and special interest groups whose programs affect the

care and management of Michigan's natural resources, especially on private lands. At the national level, the state association coordinates its activities with and supports the National Association of Conservation Districts to keep the public, Congress, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and environmental interest groups aware of the nation's soil and water conservation needs.

The state association serves its members by providing timely communications and information, educational and leadership development programs, and forums where issues of mutual concern can be discussed and solutions shared. The state association also conducts campaigns and programs that strengthen objectives and programs of local districts, and encourage land users to adopt conservation programs that protect soil, water, and related resources.

For the purpose of the Association, the Districts are organized into ten (10) geographic regions. MACD is governed by thirteen (13) council members each representing one of the ten regions, plus three (3) officers. The MACD State Council members are District directors who have accepted the added responsibility of representing their regions. MACD is supported by member District dues, grants, and by contributions from District directors and employees, agency personnel, renewable resource-based industries, business and organization, educators, and other individuals concerned about the wise care and management of the state's soil, water and related resources.

### **What is the Role of the Michigan Association of Conservation District Employees (MACDE)**

The Michigan Association of Conservation District Employees (MACDE) is a private organization formed by the District employees across the state. Its general goal is to represent the needs of some 250 District employees. It is governed by a Board of Directors, made up of one district employee from each of the 10 regions across the state. MACDE uses its large group buying power to procure things like the group health plan from Blue Cross and Blue Shield.

### **What is the Role of the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD)**

The National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD), formed in 1946, is a non-governmental, non-profit organization, which represents more than 3000 Conservation Districts nationally. The National Association of Conservation Districts maintains offices in Washington D.C. and has regional representatives located throughout the country. It provides timely communications and information, educational and leadership development programs, and forums. The National Association of Conservation Districts has established a strong voice on soil, water and other natural resource concerns at the national level. The National Association of Conservation Districts conducts campaigns and programs that strengthen objectives and programs of local Districts, and encourage land users to adopt conservation programs that protect soil, water, and related resources.

### **Other Partners in Conservation**

#### ***U.S.D.A. Farm Services Agency (FSA)***

A federal agency that provides cost share moneys for federally driven programs. Most of this cost share money is for farming related activities. Assists the District board with the establishment of the Local Work Group that develops resource issues for submission for funding under federal USDA programs. Many Conservation Districts are in buildings with an FSA office (a.k.a. the USDA Service Unit). For up-to-date information on FSA programs check their website at: <http://www.fsa.usda.gov>

#### ***Michigan State University Extension (MSUE)***

This Federal/Michigan State University partnership provides local experts in agronomy, horticulture, home economics, etc. Even though extension agents are not located in every county, they do try to

cover all of Michigan. MSUE staff serves as another source of information and assist Districts in demonstrations and education programs, which promote interest in and understanding of conservation needs, problems and solutions. Many Districts have an extension person attend District board meetings. For more information on MSUE and their on-going programs check their website at: <http://www.msue.msu.edu>

### ***Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D)***

Currently in Michigan there are seven Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) areas which cover most Districts. RC&Ds provide a multi-purpose approach to resource management. Conservation Districts provide membership to the area RC&D council and generally pay RC&D dues. In Michigan the RC&Ds have organized themselves into non-profit organizations. They administer grant projects for and through Conservation Districts. Staff assistance is provided by NRCS and many of the RC&Ds have hired additional staff. Ask your Administrator/Executive Director for detailed information regarding your RC&D area.

### ***Agricultural Experiment Station (AES)***

The Agricultural Experiment Station (AES) is part of Michigan State University. The AES conducts research and demonstrations in the area of agriculture and natural resources. There are several research stations located around Michigan. Conservation Districts can cooperate with AES in conducting on-farm or in-forest demonstrations and research. AES specialists are available to provide input into Conservation District programs and in conducting technical workshops for landowners. For more information contact your local MSU Extension agent or check the website at <http://www.maes.msu.edu>

### ***County Drain Commissioner***

County Drain Commissioners are locally elected officials charged with providing for local water management. All counties with a population of over 12,000 should have an elected county drain commissioner. In smaller counties, the county road commission is often the responsible authority. Conservation Districts have entered into agreements with their county drain commissioner relative to drain maintenance activities and inspection.

### ***Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR)***

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) is responsible for the management of the state natural resources especially as it relates to state owned land. The divisions that Conservation Districts have the most contact with are listed below. For more information on MDNR divisions and programs check their website at: <http://www.dnr.state.mi.us>

Forestry Division - Provides technical assistance to private woodland users through the Cooperative Resource Management Initiative. Assists Districts with their forestry programs.

Wildlife Division - Provides grants to Conservation Districts to provide technical assistance in establishing improved wildlife habitat on private lands.

Real Estate Division - Refers applications under Public Act 116 (Farmland and Open Space Preservation) to Districts for recommendations.

## ***Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ)***

The Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) is responsible for enforcement of many natural resource and environmental regulations including wetlands, surface water quality, and soil erosion and sedimentation control. MDEQ also provides grants to Conservation Districts to conduct non-point source pollution control programs on a watershed basis. This federal program is known as the 319 watershed program and it is administered through the Surface Water Quality Division. For a breakdown in divisions and responsibilities check the website at <http://www.deq.state.mi.us/deqdiv> or for general information on the MDEQ simply go to <http://www.deq.state.mi.us>.

## ***Other Organizations***

Many Districts have working agreements and/or memoranda of understanding with other local, state and federal agencies which define specific roles of these agencies in District programs. In addition, there are many organizations that Conservation Districts can and will interact with. Pheasants Forever, Ducks Unlimited, land conservancies, other environmental groups, foundations, local and state governmental officials, businesses, and the list goes on. These organizations can be a source of funding, resources, or other program support. They broaden the Districts' network and extend your power to get conservation accomplished for the good of the citizens of your District.