

CHAPTER XII: PARTNERS

Conservation Districts have the responsibility to address soil, water and related resource concerns within their respective District boundaries. With outside assistance, their ability to tackle local concerns is greatly enhanced through cooperation with other local, state and federal agencies to deliver educational, technical and financial assistance. By exploring opportunities to fully partner with organizations of similar interest, Districts have the ability to more effectively initiate, market and deliver programs of merit to local landowners, public officials and the general public.

The two main government agencies that assist with Conservation Districts are the Michigan Department of Agriculture (MDA) and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). There are also three main non-profit organizations that assist Districts: the Michigan Association of Conservation Districts (MACD), the Michigan Association of Conservation District Employees (MACDE), and the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD).

Section I: Governmental Partners

Michigan Department of Agriculture (MDA)

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.

The Environmental Stewardship Division staff of the Michigan Department of Agriculture carries out local District administration assistance and program coordination functions. 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.

The Conservation District *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 natural resource conservation information.
- Certify election results and audit reports.
- Conduct and supervise procedures that assure that each organized Conservation District is maintained and operated as an entity of government as provided in Public Act 267, the Open Meetings Act.
- Keep a file of all legal documents required to maintain each District as an entity of government.

The MDA 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.

For more information on MDA visit their website at: www.michigan.gov/mda.

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) 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 NRCS and the District at the time of its organization. This agreement allows the Conservation District to use the technical service of the NRCS. Most Districts have an NRCS employee referred to as the NRCS Conservationist.

In general, the agreement says that the NRCS:

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

For more information on NRCS, visit their website at: www.nrcs.usda.gov.

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 the FSA assists the District board with the establishment of the local work group, which 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, visit their website at: www.fsa.usda.gov.

Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D)

Currently in Michigan there are seven Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) areas, with one more pending approval at the national level. These areas provide coverage over the entire state and include all Conservation Districts. RC&Ds provide a multipurpose 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.

For more information on Michigan's RC&D's or to find out more about the RC&D that is in your area, visit their website at: <http://www.mi.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/rc&d.html>.

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 Water Division.

For more information on MDEQ divisions and programs, visit their website at: www.michigan.gov/deg.

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.

- **Forestry Division** - Provides technical assistance to private woodland users through the Forestry Assistance Program and assists Districts with forestry programs.
- **Wildlife Division** - Provides grants to Conservation Districts to provide technical assistance in establishing improved wildlife habitat on private lands.

For more information on MDNR divisions and programs, visit their website at: www.michigan.gov/dnr.

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 inspections.

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 demonstration 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, visit their website at: www.msue.msu.edu.

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 visit their website at: www.maes.msu.edu.

Districts Partnering With Districts

Conservation Districts can be each other's most important partners. Districts partner with other Districts for a variety of reasons: sharing programs, staff, equipment, and advertising and promotional campaigns. It is a good idea for Districts to sign a *Memorandum of Understanding* if two or more Districts are partnering together. There are several grant programs (Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, Groundwater Stewardship Program, etc.) that are implemented between Districts that specify the roles and responsibilities of "Host Districts" (Districts who are administering the program) and "Non-Host Districts" (Districts whose counties are included in the grant program but are not administering the grant).

The following is a list of roles and responsibilities recommended by the Michigan Department of Agriculture, Environmental Stewardship Division for Host and Non-Host Districts:

Host Districts (Conservation District board through the administrator):

- Daily supervision of grant employee
- Participate at meetings related to the grant program
- Ensure proposal deliverables are met
- Accountability (budget, time, performance appraisal, appropriate expenditures, documentation of work completed)
- Establish salary and administrative budget
- Computer/internet/network support
- Promote and advertise availability of the shared program
- Administrative/Clerical support for grant staff (the minimum to include: copying, printing, word processing support, taking messages, keeping a copy of personnel calendar)
- Continuity of grant staff
- Keep staff focused on work that supports their program/grant mission
- Hire, discipline, reward and fire staff
- Help staff succeed
- Write future grant proposals. If you have a local stewardship team or technical advisor committee, they as well as the non host site, may want to provide input on any grant proposals, if appropriate.

Non-Host Districts (Conservation District board, District staff, and the administrator; these are the minimum expectations):

- Participate at local Technical Advisory Committee or Stewardship Team meetings
- Give farmer referrals
- Route requests for services
- Sometimes provide office space

Host Districts may delegate or share some of their responsibilities with the Non-Host Districts.

Section II: Non-Profit Partners

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 79 Conservation Districts. It was organized in 1940 as Michigan Soil Conservation Districts Incorporated, which became the Michigan Association of Conservation Districts in 1978.

The MACD 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 natural resource 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. MACD also conducts campaigns and programs that strengthen objectives and programs of local districts, and encourage land users to adopt conservation programs that protect natural 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 contributions from: District directors and employees; agency personnel; renewable resource-based industries, business and organizations; educators; and other individuals concerned about the wise care and management of the state's natural resources. For more information on MACD visit their website at: www.macd.org

Michigan Envirothon

Administered through MACD, the *Michigan Envirothon* exists to inspire environmental stewardship in Michigan's high school students and provides a unique, hands-on experience. The Michigan Envirothon program presents environmental education in a unique, motivating, and exciting way! The program emphasizes hands-on learning in the outdoors; field trips and one-on-one training with Resource Professionals is highly encouraged. Teams are encouraged to partner with resource agencies, local government, their schools and others to develop a strong and effective project. It is very highly recommended that Districts become involved with the Michigan Envirothon in an effort to extend the District's opportunity to network with partner organizations.

Michigan Association of Conservation District Employees (MACDE)

The Michigan Association of Conservation District Employees (MACDE) is a non-profit organization formed by District employees across the state. Its general goal is to represent the needs of some 200 District employees. A board of directors, made up of one District employee from each of the 10 MACD regions across the state, governs it. MACDE uses its large group buying power to procure things like the group health plan from Blue Cross and Blue Shield.

For more information on MACDE, visit their website at: www.macde.org

National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD)

The National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD), formed in 1946, is a nongovernmental, non-profit organization, which represents more than 3000 Conservation Districts nationally. The NACD 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 NACD has established a strong voice on soil, water and other natural resource concerns at the national level.

The NACD conducts campaigns and programs that strengthen objectives and programs of local Districts, and encourages land users to adopt conservation programs that protect soil, water, and related natural resources.

For more information on NACD, visit their website at: www.nacdnet.org.

Michigan Farm Bureau

Farm Bureau is a non-governmental organization that represents and is governed by farm and ranch families. The voice of agricultural producers at all levels, the organization's scope and influence is at the local, state, national and international level. In their policy, Michigan Farm Bureau "...supports full restoration of state funding for Conservation Districts...[and]...efforts to find a dedicated source of funding for Conservation Districts, which will allow them to plan long-term projects knowing that funding is secure." Many Districts partner locally with their Farm Bureau group to deliver programs to the public.

For more information, visit their website at: www.michiganfarmbureau.com.

Michigan United Conservation Clubs (MUCC)

MUCC is the largest statewide conservation organization in the nation, with more than 40,000 members and more than 400 affiliated clubs. MUCC works to accomplish their mission of Uniting Citizens to Conserve Michigan's Natural Resources and Protect Michigan's Outdoor Heritage. MUCC works to conserve Michigan's wildlife, fisheries, waters, forests, air, and soils by providing information, education and advocacy. MUCC has also passed a resolution that reads:

Michigan United Conservation Clubs work to promote Michigan Conservation Districts as a local provider of natural resources services, for non-industrial private landowners, for the best interest of our state's natural resources and our state's wildlife.

For more information please visit www.mucc.org

Upper Peninsula Sportsman's Alliance (UPSA)

The Upper Peninsula Sportsman's Alliance was started in 1982 for the purpose of uniting sportsman's groups for a common cause. The mission of UPSA is: "to be the voice of the U.P. sportsmen and outdoor users to promote, foster and advance outdoor recreational experiences and encourage conservation of the natural resources and the environment to perpetuate the direction of management and use for the benefit of future generations by education of its members, the youth and the general public. The organization shall endeavor to cooperate, when appropriate, with the local, state and federal resource management agencies and shall encourage communication with the Dept. of Natural Resources on policy and management issues and shall respect landowner rights." The UPSA supports Conservation Districts as the entity to provide non-industrial private forestlands programs.

Soil and Water Conservation Society (SWCS)

Soil and Water Conservation Society is a nonprofit scientific and educational organization that serves as an advocate for conservation professionals and for science-based conservation practice, programs, and policy. The SWCS mission is to foster the science and art of natural resource conservation. The work targets conservation of soil, water, and related natural resources on working land—the land used to produce food, fiber, and other services that improve the quality of life people experience in rural and urban communities. SWCS works to discover, develop, implement, and constantly improve ways to use land that sustains its productive capacity and enhances the environment at the same time.

Districts interested in partnering with the SWCS should visit <http://www.miswcs.org/>.

Other Organizations

Many Districts have working agreements and/or memorandum 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, such as:

- Pheasants Forever
- Ducks Unlimited
- Trout Unlimited
- Michigan Tree Farm System
- United Way
- Michigan Milk Producers
- Quality Deer Management Association
- National Wild Turkey Federation
- Tip of the Mitt
- Huron Pines
- Michigan Environmental Council
- Great Lakes Commission, and
- Various land conservancies, environmental groups, foundations, local and state governmental officials, and businesses.

These organizations can be a source of funding, resources, or other program support. They broaden the Districts' network and extend its power to get conservation accomplished for the good of the citizens of the District.