



Van Buren Conservation District

April 2026 Program Update

When it rains, it pours, and it is April! We're excited to be outdoors a lot this month and all over the county with various projects and events.

Grants Received - The Michigan Department of Natural Resources awarded both grants we applied for last fall for invasive species work. We received the highest amount of grant funds for these projects of all of the applications awarded in the state. With these funds, we will provide education; survey for high priority, high impact invasive species; and train more people to find and manage invasive species.

Seasonal Employees Hired - We have hired three seasonal employees who will start mid-May to work on invasive species projects and recycling projects with the rest of the team. We are looking forward to making great impacts and providing services with these folks this summer.

Tree Sale - Leftover seedlings will be available for sale April 10 and 11 in Paw Paw (VBCD office) and South Haven (Liberty Hyde Bailey Museum). Adding these seedlings to your property encourages large scale pollinator and wildlife habitat building and adds to our community's beauty. Profits from the sale go back into our conservation efforts and programs. Shop the sale at VanBurenCD.org/Shop

VBCD Newsletter - Our subscriber newsletter is now available on our website at VanBurenCD.org/News and will be attached to these update emails going forward. We hope this helps you stay connected. As always, reach out anytime with questions, ideas, and concerns.

Emilly Hickmott

Emilly Hickmott, Executive Director

Upcoming Events (details available on [our website](#))

- Tree Sale Order Pickup & Leftover Sale | Friday, April 10 & Saturday April, 11 | VanBurenCD.org/shop
- VBCD Board Meeting | April 22 | VanBurenCD.org/About
- Electronics Recycling Event - Porter Township | Tuesday, May 5 | <https://vanburencd.org/van-buren-county-recycling-collections/>
- Electronics Transfer Station Host Drop-off - Decatur | Saturday, May 9 and Saturday, May 16 | <https://vanburencd.org/van-buren-county-recycling-collections/>
- Memorial Day - office closed | Monday, May 25



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- VBCD Board Meeting | Wednesday, May 27 | VanBurenCD.org/About
- VBCD at the Decatur Night Market | Friday, May 29
- VBCD Annual Meeting & Director Election | July 17 | details to be announced

Program Updates

Resource Recovery & Recycling (*Kalli Marshall, Jacob Diljak*) – Five communities have worked with us to make their drop-off centers a place that you can bring foam in for recycling year-round. You can learn more about where and how by checking out the announcement at VanBurenCD.org/foam-recycling Our 2026 collection events have been announced. This year's electronic recycling opportunities have been changed to make it easier to keep those valuable materials in the economy. VanBurenCD.org/van-buren-county-recycling-collections

Outreach (*Jacob Diljak*) – Jacob worked hard to wrap up his tree sale and Food, Farm, & Fun Guide assignments. The guides will be distributed in April. He also prepared training materials and notes for the team before his last day mid-March. We wish Jacob well on his next adventure!

Agriculture & Water Quality Team (*Erin Fuller and Colleen Forestieri*) – In February, Colleen Forestieri attended the Underground Innovations Conference in Frankenmuth, MI. Colleen was invited to moderate a farmer forum and panel discussion at the conference, discussing Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) projects. In March, the team held the Farming for the Future Conference and connected with over 100 attendees about conservation practices.

Invasive Species SWxSW Corner CISMA Team (*Alex Florian and Jena Johnson*) – The CISMA team hosted our Annual Meeting, took the first major steps towards hiring our 2026 strike team crew, and attended the MISC Annual Meeting in Gaylord, MI. The CISMA team steadily chipped away at multiple projects with upcoming deadlines, and worked to stay on top of public inquiries. In terms of field work, the team stayed busy doing contracting work for Chikaming Open Lands, and began GLRI shrub management with the help of Van Buren Conservation District conservation technician, Gabe Francisco.

Conservation Technical Assistance Program: MAEAP and Regenerative Agriculture Programs (*Kyle Mead*) – The specialist continues to plug away at farm visits for assessments and verifications. As days get longer and warmer this gets easier. Kyle continues to assist the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) as they need, and is helping to put the final touches on



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VBCD's annual Farming for the Future Event as well the Regional Envirothon competition which both happened in March.

Natural Resource Technical Assistance (*Gabriel Francisco*) - This month has been dedicated to many national NRCS training, and assisting the CISMA team performing GLRI Shrub Management work. NRCS trainings for the standard Farm Bill Roll out that happens each year in February as well as training in both providing assistance to USDA Organic producers and Soil Health training regarding the new RPP (Regenerative Pilot Program) offered through the Department of Agriculture this year.

Forestry Assistance Program (*Benjamin Savoie, Barry Conservation District*) - Ben is working across nine counties, including Van Buren County, supporting our forests. Working with landowners, Ben works in the Qualified Forest Program to save landowners money and strengthen forest health.