



Michigan Association of Conservation Districts

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“Your Land, Your Water, Your Michigan”

News Release

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Despite Deep Cuts, Conservation Districts Still Doing Business

East Lansing, MI. Despite deep budget cuts made by the State of Michigan, Michigan Conservation Districts (Districts) are still striving to deliver State and Federal conservation programs to Michigan's farmers and private landowners. Governor Jennifer Granholm dealt Districts a huge blow when she vetoed the line item in the FY 2010 budget that had given support to local Conservation Districts.

There are 79 local Conservation Districts covering the entire state. These Districts are local, special purpose units of state government and are responsible for preserving the soil and water resources of the State. Through programs of technical and financial assistance to landowners, Districts coordinate services and resources from various State and Federal agencies.

These Districts deliver State programs, such as the Michigan Water Stewardship Program, Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, and the Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP). Prior to this year's veto, Districts that met the minimum program requirements, as determined by the Michigan Department of Agriculture (MDA), had received annual funding to support basic operations. In FY 2009, MDA budgeted a total of \$236,900 in base grant funding for Michigan's Conservation Districts. The elimination of this funding has left Districts scrambling to find ways to continue to deliver their important services.

“Even with the Governor's Line Item veto that totally eliminated Districts from the State budget, they are still doing their best to assist landowners and deliver programs that bring conservation benefits and financial resources to local communities,” said Lori Phalen, Executive Director of Michigan Association of Conservation Districts (MACD).

Although Districts are without funds, they still remain important vehicles for getting lots of money to farmers and private landowners. However difficult it is to continue to deliver programs to local communities, the Districts are determined to find other means to keep their doors open and continue the important service farmers and private landowners have come to expect. They remain dedicated and committed because they understand the importance of what they do.

“It is amazing that given the importance of Districts in the local delivery of conservation programs that not only provide significant environmental benefits but millions of dollars to local communities that the state would eliminate funding,,” Lori said, “especially considering what a small amount of funding Conservation Districts actually were to have received.

MDA conservation programs that are delivered through Districts remain funded, though most of them have been reduced from last year's budget. In Fiscal Year 2010, the MDA will make available almost \$2.9 million in conservation programs that will provide technical assistance to farmers and private land owners. That's just under last year's total of \$3.0 million.

That money is distributed among eight MDA-sponsored programs that Conservation Districts deliver:

- Bovine Tuberculosis (TB) disease eradication program
- Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) designed to stimulate the development and adoption of innovative conservation approaches and technologies



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- Michigan's Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) that helps preserve vulnerable land areas in Michigan
- Conservation Technical Assistance Initiative (CTAI)
- Emerald Ash Borer (EAB)
- Forestry Assistance Program
 - No monies allocated since FY07
- Michigan Water Stewardship Program, helping fertilizer users reduce risks to groundwater
- Michigan's Agriculture Environmental Assurance Programs (MAEAP), assisting farmers to implement agricultural pollution prevention practices
 - No funding for either FY09 or FY10

Partnership with NRCS

Another set of programs that Districts deliver are provided federally through the 2008 Farm Bill. The United States Department of Agriculture, Natural Resource Conservation Service is the federal agency that disseminates monies to states from the Farm Bill. The Farm Bill, also known as the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 provides conservation opportunities for farmers, agricultural producers, and ranchers.

In the past 10 years, Conservation Districts as the local assistance entry point, were able to disseminate almost \$430 million to local communities through the Farm Bill. Last year, Conservation Districts delivered a total of \$26 million through six programs funded by the Farm Bill.

Farm Bill programs delivered through Conservation Districts include:

- The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) provides financial assistance to landowners for improving their conservation methods on agricultural lands.
- The Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP), a voluntary program that allows landowners to restore former wetlands that were converted to farmland.
- The Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) assists landowners in improving wildlife habitat on their property. WHIP provides financial assistance to establish or improve wildlife and aquatic habitat.
- The Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) helps landowners and operators restore and protect grassland, including rangeland, pastureland, shrub land, while maintaining the areas for grazing.
- The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) encourages producers to improve, maintain, and manage existing conservation activities.

For more information about Farm Bill 2008 programs in Michigan, visit the MACD web site at:

www.macd.org and/or NRCS/USDA website at: www.mi.nrcs.usda.gov

The work of the Michigan Conservation Districts is important and the local, state and federal partnership with MDA and the USDA-NRCS is one of the most efficient and effective conservation delivery mechanisms in Michigan. Michigan Conservation Districts are committed to their work of providing conservation programs and services to the farmers and private land owners of Michigan. They will continue to host fundraisers and look for other sources of financial support in order to continue to do this important work as long as possible for the benefit of all Michigan's citizens.

Michigan Association of Conservation Districts (MACD) is a non-profit organization that represents the interests of Michigan Conservation Districts and works to strengthen Districts through leadership, information and representation at the state level. Michigan's 79 Conservation Districts are the local providers of natural resource management services that help our citizens conserve their lands and our environment for a cleaner, healthier, economically stronger Michigan.