



CONSERVATION UPDATE

A publication of the Washtenaw County Conservation District

SUMMER 2007

Volume 39, Number 4

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Our Mission

*To educate and assist the people
of Washtenaw County with the
conservation and management
of their natural resources.*

Web Access

www.washtenawcd.org

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Washtenaw County CD
7203 Jackson Road
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A Waste Knot Partner

Spring Tree Sale Completed, Fall Sale On Tap

Spring Sale

The Washtenaw County Conservation District recently completed its annual spring tree and native plants sale with a total of 548 orders received for over 72,000 tree and shrub seedlings, plus native wildflower and prairie grass plants.

The District conducts two tree and plant sales each year to provide planting stock for such conservation purposes as reforestation, windbreaks and screens, erosion control, wildlife habitat and landscape naturalizing.

Some of the key quantities of trees, shrubs, plants and other items distributed through the spring tree and native plants sale included:

- Tree & shrub seedlings: 72,852
- Ferns: 760 roots
- Wildflower & prairie grass plants: 238 plants, 28 butterfly and rain garden kits
- Wildlife food plot seed mixes: 161 pounds of seed
- Wildflower seed: over 28 pounds

Seventeen volunteers assisted the District with tree and shrub order packaging and distribution at the Washtenaw Farm Council Grounds. The Conservation District thanks the following volunteers for their help during the spring tree sale:

- Eight years: Jeanne Kuo, Ann Arbor and Dave Lazor, Clinton.
- Seven Years: Bob Miller, Manchester.
- Six years: Kathleen Wilhelmsen, Ann Arbor.
- Five years: John Adams and Linda Lawrence, Ann Arbor.
- Four years: Rick Meader, Ypsilanti; Monica Milla, Ann Arbor; and Sue Whitehill, Saline.

- Two years: Sara Bassett, Manchester; Jean Fiegel, Saline; and Cindy Fischer, Dexter.
- First year volunteers: Celia Copeland, Ann Arbor; Brenda Schrader, Saline; Greg Schwerin, Clinton; Aistis Tumas, AmeriCorps; and Karen Wongstrom, South Lyon.

Fall Tree Sale

Plans are underway for the District 2007 fall tree and native plant sale.

Conifer seedlings and transplant offerings will tentatively include: Red Pine, White Pine and Blue Spruce seedlings; White Cedar, Balsam Fir, White Pine, Blue Spruce, Norway Spruce and White Spruce transplants.

Tentative native plant selection will include: New England Aster, Bee Balm, Black-Eyed Susan, Cardinal Flower, Columbine, Yellow Coneflower, Blue Flag Iris, Rough Blazing Star, Woodland Sunflower, Pennsylvania Sedge, Big Bluestem, Little Bluestem, Indian Grass and Switch Grass. Butterfly and Rain Garden Kits will also be available.

Also included in the fall sale will be Christmas, Hay-scented, Lady and Ostrich fern roots; and Crocus, Checkered Lily, Wood Hyacinth and Tulip flower bulbs for naturalizing.

Sale catalogs will be mailed out in late August. To add your name to the catalog mailing list, contact the District office at: (734) 761-6721 ext. 5.

Orders will be accepted until late September, with pick-up planned for early October.

Information will also be available on the District web site at: www.washtenawcd.org.



Forestry Niche

by *ANDY HENRIKSEN, District Forester*

The Qualified Forestry Program – A New Tax Saving Opportunity for Forest Owners

In September 2006 the General Property Tax Act (1893 PA 206, as amended) was amended to add the Qualified Forest Property (QFP) tax exemption (Public Acts 378, 379 and 380). The intent of this tax exemption is to encourage private landowners to manage their land for forestry by providing a property tax reduction as an incentive. Landowners approved for this tax exemption are exempt from some school operating taxes (18 mils). Participating landowners are not required to allow public access on their land.

Landowners approved for this exemption must have a minimum of 20 vacant, contiguous acres (no buildings or structures are allowed), and are limited to exempting 320 acres per taxing unit.

Landowners must manage their land with an approved forest management plan or forest management plan certified by a third-party certifying organization. Participating landowners are required to report to the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) annually the amount of timber produced on this land and whether any buildings or structures have been constructed on the land.

The amount of land eligible for the qualified forest property tax exemption state-wide is limited to 300,000 acres beginning in 2008 which will be the first year land may receive this tax exemption. Landowners wishing to be considered for this tax exemption must submit a "Claim for Qualified Forest Property Tax Exemption" (Michigan Department of Treasury Form 4449 "Affidavit") available on the Michigan Department of Treasury webpage at http://www.michigan.gov/taxes/0,1607,7-238-43535_43537-154841--,00.html.

The Affidavit, two copies of the forest management plan (and two copies of any third party certification, if applicable) and a plan review fee must be submitted prior to November 1, in order to be considered for the tax exemption in the following tax year.

The local tax collecting unit assessor will determine if the land is qualified forest property based upon a recommendation from the DNR that the landowner has an approved forest management plan and after determining the acreage limitation has not been exceeded.

Forest management plan requirements are prescribed in the 2006 PA 378 and are summarized in

provided below.

If you have more specific questions about the forest management plan or third-party certifying organizations please feel free to contact the DNR Service Forester for Southern Michigan, Mike Hanley at 517-241-1608 or hanleym@michigan.gov.

The DNR also offers a cost share program for the creation of forest management plans through the Forest Stewardship Program. If you are interested in this type of program please contact:

Debra Huff, Forest Stewardship Coordinator
Forest, Mineral & Fire Management
Department of Natural Resources
517-335-3355
huffd@michigan.gov

If you have specific tax questions relating to the qualified forest property tax exemption please contact:

Harold Anderson, Manager
Assessment Review Unit
Assessment and Certification
Division
Michigan Department of Treasury
517-373-3327
andersonh@michigan.gov

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WLT is a private, nonprofit organization working to protect farmland, natural areas and open space in the Washtenaw County region.



WLT offers land preservation services that:

- Respect private property ownership
- Provide access to income, estate & property tax benefits
- Allow landowners to leave a legacy of open land for future generations

For more information please contact us at: (734) 302-5263 or info@washtenawlandtrust.org Web: www.washtenawlandtrust.org



Groundwater Gab

By Aistis Tumas, AmeriCorps Member
Michigan Groundwater Stewardship Program



Conservationist Corner

By Steve Olds, District Conservationist

Car Care for Cleaner Water

Did you know that Americans spill over 180 million gallons of used motor oil each year? Oil that leaks from our cars onto roads or driveways can end up washing into storm drains, which lead directly to rivers, lakes, and wetlands. Just one pint of oil is enough to make an oil slick larger than a football field. Since oil is toxic to humans, wildlife and plants, we can all do our part to keep water clean. Here are some simple steps to cleaner water.

Check you car for oil and fluid leaks, and if you find them, have them fixed promptly. To clean up a spill, use cat litter to absorb the material and put it in a sealed bag for disposal.

Recycle your used oil. Old motor oil can be reprocessed and used over again. Many gas stations and auto supplies stores accept used oil. Never pour used oil down a drain or onto the ground, since spilled oil causes long-term environmental damage.

Instead of washing your car in your driveway, which can cause oil and soap to flow into storm drains and into nearby water bodies, consider using a commercial car wash. Many car washes re-use water several times and send it to a sewer system for treatment.

To learn more ways to keep water clean, contact Aistis Tumas, AmeriCorps Volunteer with the Conservation District, at (734) 761-6721 Ext. 101 to sign up for a free water quality risk assessment of your home.

Lease Agreements with Hunters

For years, arguments between farmers and hunters have continued with no obvious solution. But farmers still suffer deer damage to their crops and hunters still say they can't find private land to hunt on.

Farmers are encouraged to seek out more good hunters, and hunters are encouraged to be respectful of the land they're on, and to be responsible enough to ease farmers' fear of liability lawsuits.

One way farmers can be sure the hunters to whom they give access will be safe and responsible is the hunter access lease agreement. Easily downloadable from the Michigan Farm Bureau web site (www.michiganfarmbureau.com), a sample agreement, which can be tailored to individual farm operations, spells out how much will be paid by the hunter to the farmer, which land can be hunted, and standard behavioral expectations.

With all the terms spelled out, farmers can rest assured that rogue or unsafe hunters are kept out (hunters who have paid for the privilege tend to get possessive about their hunting spots), and can concentrate on finding the right number of hunters to ease their crop damage problems.

Farmers should encourage the hunter to bring his son or daughter. Try allowing two more hunters the next year, and if there is still damage, add another the next year. The farmer will be able to find the right number of hunters who can safely control the herd.

Remember too, that between bow season, gun and muzzle-loading seasons, there needn't be more than a few days between October 1 and January 1 when hunters are not on your farm, helping control the deer herd, which in turn helps protect crops.

Local Farmland Protection Projects Selected for Federal Grants

NRCS and Conservation District play key role

Farmland preservation efforts in Washtenaw County have again benefited from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS) Farm and Ranchland Protection Program. The program was authorized through Conservation Provisions of the 2002 Farm Bill.

According to a recent Ann Arbor News article published June 15, 2007: "Washtenaw County land preservation projects have been awarded almost \$1.6 million in federal dollars to help protect four parcels of farmland totaling 527 acres in Webster and Scio Townships. While the grants do not guarantee that any of the parcels will be protected from development, they significantly advance the efforts to protect the parcels."

Also as reported in the article; "The grants represent all the money awarded to Michigan from the program this year. In 2006 Washtenaw County projects received 61% of the federal farmland protection money awarded in Michigan and in 2005 that figure was 76%."

Prior to any monies being received, the participating landowners must first have a Resource Management System conservation plan developed that addresses soil, water, air, plant and animal resource concerns on their land. *The local NRCS and Washtenaw County Conservation District planners provide this technical assistance.* The local NRCS staff also provides assistance during the application phase with "verifying" prime agricultural soils calculations being submitted by the local sponsoring entity.

For additional information on the federal Farm and Ranchland Protection Program visit www.mi.nrcs.usda.gov or call me at 734-761-6722 x 3.

The NRCS and Conservation District are equal opportunity providers and employers.

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Think Habitat!

For information on establishing food or habitat plots for pheasants and other wildlife, call Steve Schneider at (734) 662-2522 or write:

Washtenaw County Chapter,
Pheasants Forever, PO Box
3478, Ann Arbor MI 48106-3478
Web Site: www.washtenawpf.org



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Update on District Funding Cuts

As reported in the Spring "Conservation Update" issue, Michigan's Conservation Districts face the loss of base operation grants and funding for the Forestry Assistance Program in the 2008 State budget.

Currently, the State Legislature is working on the 2008 budget. The Senate version of the budget includes operating grant funding for Conservation Districts at a level 39.6% less than 2007 budget levels, prior to Executive Directive cuts. Also, forestry program funding is not included. There is still a long way to go before the State budget is finalized however, possibly September.

The District would still appreciate calls, letters, faxes or e-mails to your State Senators, Representatives and the Governor, asking them to restore fiscal year 2008 funding for Conservation Districts and the Forestry Assistance Program.

Over the next few months, the District Board will be discussing the District's 2008 budget and making decisions about District programs based upon various funding scenarios. As a result, the status of District programs and services for 2008 is unknown at this time.

If you need contact information for your elected officials please call the District office, phone: (734) 761-6721 ext. 5; or visit the District web site at: www.washtenawcd.org. A list of contact information can be downloaded from the site.

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