Eicher and Kingsbury Named 2014 Farmer of the Year
See Page 9

2014 Agricultural Field Day See Page 9

Shiawassee Conservation District 65th Annual Meeting is March 5. See Page 2
Jay Korson, SCD Agricultural Technician, conducts a survey of streams in the Upper Looking Glass River Watershed during the Fall of 2014. Signs of erosion, riparian condition, and evidence of pollution are key indicators of the quality of a watercourse.

**STREAM SURVEYS CONDUCTED FOR WATERSHED PLANNING**

The Shiawassee Conservation District was recently awarded a grant to develop watershed management plans for the Upper Misteguay Creek Watershed and the Upper Looking Glass River Watershed through the Michigan Stormwater, Asset Management and Wastewater (SAW) program initiative. Over the next three years, the Shiawassee Conservation District will develop a watershed management plan for the Upper Misteguay Creek Watershed and update the existing Upper Looking Glass River Watershed Management Plan. A critical part of developing the plans is completing a comprehensive inventory of the streams to identify natural resource issues and high quality areas. The findings will be used to develop long-term water quality priorities and recommendations, which will be instrumental in obtaining future funding to assist landowners with conservation issues.

For more information on watershed management planning projects for the Upper Misteguay Creek Watershed and Upper Looking Glass River Watershed, please contact the Shiawassee Conservation District.

Shiawassee Conservation District
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The Shiawassee Conservation District Agricultural Technician provided an on-farm site assessment to evaluate the farm infrastructure and management practices, and the potential impacts they may have on natural resources. “Farm*A*Systs can really help a farmer focus in on the problems they might have on their farm. We work with the farmer to develop a conservation plan based on the findings from assessments such as the Farm*A*Syst,” stated Shiawassee Conservation District Agricultural Technician Jay Korson. “Then we can help them get the technical and financial assistance they need to correct or prevent any potential problems.”

With the help of the Conservation District and the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), Nathan Allen has spent the last few years working on implementing recommendations outlined in his conservation plan, which will help ensure the economic and environmental viability of his farm. These services are provided confidentially and are completely voluntary. “The District helped me prioritize and plan my projects,” stated Nathan Allen. “In the end, I was able to make changes when it made sense to me.”

Additionally, Nathan has developed a Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan (CNMP) for his livestock operation. This document makes recommendations for practices that should be adopted and can be cost shared through NRCS Conservation Farm Bill programs. It also includes a manure management plan which is required for Michigan Right to Farm compliance.

Recently, Nathan has completed a solid waste storage facility that allows him to safely and conveniently store manure. It also provides flexibility in making manure applications. Nathan has also completed several gutter systems that will divert clean rain water from the livestock lot. These practices were provided financial and technical assistance through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program. He updated his fueling facility by installing a concrete fueling pad and installing protective barriers around the fuel tanks.

Nathan is participating in the Shiawassee Conservation District’s BMP Auction. He is implementing cover crops into his crop rotation and applying gypsum to his fields to improve soil texture and health.

The Shiawassee Conservation District recognizes the dedicated hard work put in by Nathan Allen and all farmers that are implementing practices that protect our natural resources and the future of Michigan agriculture. Contact the District for more information on MAEAP and other conservation program opportunities available through the District office.

Whether your property is an urban backyard or a country landscape, you can improve wildlife habitat on your property. The Shiawassee Conservation District offers free technical assistance to prepare individually tailored conservation plans to help you achieve your wildlife goals.

Habitat can be broken into four parts: food, water, shelter, and space. When all parts blend together, wildlife not only survives, they thrive. The Conservation District can work with you to address each resource concern you have. For example, if you want to attract wildlife such as ground nesting birds on your property you may want to consider establishing warm season grasses and wildflowers. These types of grasses are “bunch grasses” that grow in clumps and provide cover for wildlife to move more easily through the vegetation. They also have stiffer stems that stand up to snow and provide cover in the winter months. Furthermore, warm season grasses have deep root systems which promote soil infiltration of water and control erosion. Planting wildflowers with the grasses provides additional food and cover.

If your property includes a woodlot, you may want to consider hiring a forester to prepare a Forest Management Plan. Your plan will outline a schedule of activities such as selective cutting, timbering, and harvesting or killing selected trees based on your specific objectives.

No matter what size your property is or the type of wildlife you are interested in attracting, the planning process is the same. A Conservation District technician will work closely with you to evaluate your property, determine your goals and alternatives, and ultimately provide you with a comprehensive conservation plan that becomes your road-map to help improve and maintain the natural resources of your land.

The Conservation District has technical assistance available, made possible through a partnership with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, and Natural Resources Conservation Service to assist you in conservation planning. Once you have a plan in place, you can use it as a springboard to apply for funding to implement your plan. Funding may be available through a variety of opportunities such as Farm Bill Programs, including the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative-Environmental Quality Incentives Program (GLRI-EQIP), MDCR wildlife grants, and other District programs. Contact the Shiawassee Conservation District for more information about conservation planning and conservation programs that may be available to you.
Cover Crops on the Fly...

With the recent resurgence of adding cover crops into one’s crop rotation, soil, crops, and producers have a lot to be happy about. Cover crops help increase organic matter content, recycle unused nutrients, promote biological activity, improve water infiltration, reduce compaction, and improve crop yields. However, there is one downfall, many producers think that they are not able to hop onto the cover crop bandwagon because they don’t know where or how to fit cover crops into the rotation. Many Shiawassee County producers who plant cover crops plant them after they harvest their wheat; which is ideal because the seed has ample time to grow and produce above and below ground biomass. There is also typically more time in mid-summer to plant a cover crop than after the rush of harvest.

“Flying on a cover crop is a newer alternative available to producers with a variety of crops and rotations. Producers hire pilots to fly cover crop seeds onto cash crops during the growing season. Several producers who have worked in conjunction with the Shiawassee Conservation District and the Natural Resources Conservation Service have provided testimony to validate ‘flying on’ success. Jason Eicher, local producer, said, ‘Cover crops are very easy to get flown on…, and it works out good because you never know what the weather will be like in the fall, if you’ll have time to put something down after harvest, or the weather is too cold or wet. When you plant in August or September you get weeks of extra growing and benefit to your soil.’ Another Shiawassee County producer said, “This is the second year I flew on cover crops and I have been very pleased with them. They get a lot of growth that I wouldn’t have if I waited until the end of the season. With the extra growth, you get a lot of organic matter.” Additionally David Mitchell, local producer, said, “Flying on cover crops has allowed me to get in the field when I wouldn’t be able to otherwise and allows for a good stand to develop before cold weather. I also like the practice because the cost is similar to drilling or broadcasting on your own.”

There are several reasons to fly on cover crops. Producers across the nation have found that they receive a greater benefit by planting earlier. When planting a cover crop earlier in the growing season, there is significantly more time for the plant to grow (approximately more sunlight, warmer temperatures, and potential for fall rains). This allows the cover crop to flourish and provide maximum benefits and maximum return on your investment. Some producers have said that rye grass roots grew 3-5 feet when they were flown on compared to root growth of 1-2 feet of growth when drilled at the end of the growing season. Imagine how much extra organic matter this adds to your soil as well as the improvement in the ability of water and oxygen to infiltrate deeper into the soil (via root channels). This all adds up to enhanced biological activity and overall improved plant growth and yield.

Flying on a cover crop does not come without some risks. Several considerations should be made before one decides to “fly on” a cover crop. One should think about whom they will have fly on the cover crop, their availability, and their cost (cheaper may not necessarily be the best deal, someone with experience may broadcast the seed better). It is also important to think about the seeding rate and the exact time of year cover should be planted. Seeding rates will need to be increased from that of a drilled rate as seed to ground contact is not as high. Additionally, experts suggest waiting to plant until the cash crop is quite mature. For soybeans, leaves should be yellow, but not yet dropped. Corn should be dried up to ear before planting. Available sunlight is critical for successful establishment. Rows should have about 50% sunlight. Too little sunlight will limit the amount of photosynthesis that can occur and could increase the chances of the seed rotting or molding.

Area farmers have had success planting rye, oats, and mixtures of rye and radishes. If you are interested in learning more about flying on cover crops or financial assistance that is available to begin planting cover crops please contact the Shiawassee Conservation District and the Natural Resources Conservation Service at (989) 723-8263 ext 3.

Pictured above is a cover crop mixture including oil seed radish planted at 5lbs/ac and annual rye grass planted at 10 lbs/ac. This mix is part of Natural Resources Conservation Service Service Plant Material Center’s test plot located at the Lee Farms in Sciota Township. Planting a diverse mix enhances the many benefits that cover crops offer.

Technical and financial assistance are available to farmers who would like to try cover crops or enhance their current cover crop operation through Conservation Farm Bill Programs such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program. Contact the Shiawassee Conservation District office for more information.

Local farmer, Jason Eicher (pictured right) spoke during the Shiawassee County Agricultural Tour held in September 2014. He shared his personal experiences with aerial seeding a mix of radish and rye cover crops.

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Access to clean water is everyone’s right and responsibility. When not properly treated, human waste can severely pollute water. To help homeowners with wastewater treatment, the Shiawassee Conservation District kicked off its Septic System Assistance Program in 2014. The program offers financial assistance to those in the Holly Drain Watershed to address pollution caused by failing septic systems.

Several successes were achieved in 2014 through this program including, three residential septic systems replaced and one home septic tank pumped with two more systems scheduled for replacement in 2015. Homeowners who participated in the program received cost-share to cover 75% of the cost of the septic system replacement or tank pumping.

Failing septic systems contribute harmful bacteria to surface and ground water and can cause significant property damage. This has been documented in the Holly Drain Watershed, located in portions of Vernon, Burns, and Shiawassee Townships in Shiawassee County. Contamination from septic sources can pose serious health risks and can cause severe illness.

To kick off the program, the Conservation District hosted an E. coli and Your Water Workshop in February at the Durand City Hall. Speaking at the event was Scott Reynolds from Environmental Canine Services, LLC who talked about the work that he and his team of canines do assisting with water quality projects. Along with Scott was Sable, the first ever scent trained canine who can sniff out septic waste in surface water. Also at the workshop, the Shiawassee County Health Department presented about the ongoing E. coli issues in the Holly Drain Watershed and the effects that these bacteria have on human health. The Conservation District also presented about the Septic System Assistance Program held in March.

The response to the Septic System Assistance Program has been very positive. The Conservation District not only helps homeowners with expensive septic system repairs, but also provides invaluable education on preventing environmental risks in and around the home. Through an on-site educational session, participants are able to learn about groundwater, its importance, carelessness and lack of understanding can lead to groundwater contamination.

Groundwater Myths and Facts

Michigan has 1.25 million private household wells pumping about 194 million gallons of groundwater per day making it one of our most important resources. Yet groundwater is often taken for granted. Unfortunately, carelessness and lack of groundwater contamination can lead to groundwater being contaminated.

1. Groundwater flows mainly in underground rivers. - True! Only a small amount of the world’s groundwater flows in underground streams through caves. Most groundwater moves through tiny spaces between particles in rock or soil. Similar to a sponge soaking up water, the region in the ground below the water table is completely saturated with water.

2. Most of the U.S. freshwater supply is groundwater. - True! According to the National Ground Water Association (NGWA), 90% of the U.S. freshwater supply is groundwater.

3. Depending on the type of rock or soil, groundwater will flow at different rates. - True! Each type of rock or soil has a level of permeability, or the speed at which water moves through porous material. For example, gravel and sand have higher permeability than clay.

If you are located in the Holly Drain Watershed and have noticed the signs of septic system failure or it has been a while since your septic tank was pumped, contact the Conservation District to see if you qualify for the program today.

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Shiawassee Conservation District Annual Report • Sunday, February 15, 2015 Page 5

Helping Homeowners REDUCE E. COLI in the Holly Drain Watershed

Helping Homeowners REDUCE E. COLI in the Holly Drain Watershed
Cover Crop Survey Report Documents Yield Boost and Soil Benefits

For the second year in a row, a national survey of farmers has documented a yield boost from the use of cover crops in corn and soybean fields, as well as a wide variety of other benefits. The survey—which was funded by the North Central Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Extension (SARE) program and carried out by the Conservation Technology Information Center (CTIC)—also details the challenges and benefits farmers expect from cover crops, data on the costs of seed and establishment, and insight into how farmers learn to manage cover crops.

In all, 1,924 respondents—both users and non-users of cover crops—completed the survey in the winter of 2013-2014. Of the total, 639 provided data comparing corn yields on similar fields with and without cover crops. They noted an average yield increase of five bushels per acre, or 3.1 percent, on fields that had been planted to cover crops before corn. Comparing yields in soybeans, 583 farmers reported an average boost of two bushels per acre, or 4.3 percent, following cover crops.

These increases, while significant, are lower than the boost discovered in a similar survey last year by SARE and CTIC, which saw improvements of 11.1 bushels (9 percent) in corn following cover crops and 4.9 bushels (10 percent) of soybeans after cover crops. Rob Myers, regional director of Extension programs for NCR-SARE and an agronomist at the University of Missouri, points out that much of the difference in yield impact between the two years of surveys may be attributed to the drought in 2012, which highlights the moisture-management benefits of cover crops.

The new report also reveals other benefits farmers gain from planting cover crops, including increases in soil organic matter, reduced soil erosion and compaction, improved weed control, the availability of “free” nitrogen through soil fixation by legumes and others.

The Shiawassee Conservation District and Natural Resources Conservation Service provide technical assistance to those who are interested in trying or enhancing cover crops in their cropping operation. Financial assistance may also be available through Farm Bill and Conservation District programs. Contact the District office for more information. Full results of the CTIC surveys are available online at www.northcentralsare.org/CoverCropsSurvey.

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**Cover Crop Survey Report**

**Check List of Plants**

- Bedsawan Fir
- Colorado Spruce
- Eastern White Pine
- Heatproof Silk F大力推进
- Green Mountain Aspen
- Red Cedar
- Red Pine
- White Pine
- White Spruce
- Butternut
- Chinkapin Oak
- Red Maple
- Red Oak
- Sugar Maple
- White Oak
- Yellow Birch
- Highbush Cranberry
- Nurseryberry
- Elderberry
- Swamp Dogwood
- Silver Birch
- Paper Cone Birch
- Red Maple
- Sassafras
- Sugar Maple
- Swamp Willow
- Tulip Poplar

**SINGLE/LARGE TREES**

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- Sassafras
- Sugar Maple
- Swamp Willow
- Tulip Poplar

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The Shiawassee Conservation District is offering farmers a unique opportunity to adopt Best Management Practices (BMP) such as cover crops, no till, or filter strips on their cropland. These practices can be funded through a simplified enrollment process and at a cost share rate that meets the needs of each individual farmer. This program is delivered in an auction format where farmers place a bid on adopting a BMP practice. Farmers consider their time, fuel, materials, foregone income, etc. when placing their bid. Bids are non-commital and on a per field basis.

The Conservation District works in partnership with Michigan State University to have the bids evaluated and ranked. The bid cost, practice, soil type, slope, and proximity to surface water all play a part in the ranking results. High ranking bids are those that save the most soil from leaving farm land per dollar spent.

To date, the Shiawassee Conservation District has held two BMP auctions. During the first bid period, the Conservation District received 21 bids. The District funded the top 13 offers, covering just over 400 acres with minimal paperwork and no binding contract. In addition, the cost of installation can be covered by the Conservation District. Speak to Conservation District staff to receive more information and for assistance on bid sheets.

Bids will be accepted within the Mid-Shiawassee River Watershed to try a new practice with minimal paperwork and no binding contract. In addition, the cost of installation can be covered by the Conservation District. Speak to Conservation District staff to receive more information and for assistance on bid sheets. Bids will be accepted through March 31, 2015.

Continued from Page 5

4. If a well reaches ground-water, an unlimited amount of water can be pumped.
   - True! The ground is like a sponge and it soaks up water until it is saturated.
   - False! The amount of water that a well can pump depends on the soil or rock formations of the aquifer. For example, clay holds a lot of water, but the tiny pore spaces do not allow the water to flow readily.

5. Rain and snowmelt infiltrate into the ground to become ground-water.
   - True! The ground is like a sponge and it soaks up water until it is saturated.
   - False! Homeowner activities such as improperly maintaining septic systems, dumping used motor oil, and misapplication of lawn and garden fertilizer can lead to contamination of groundwater supply.

Continued on Page 11
Jay Korson, SCD Agricultural Technician and Greg Lienau, NRCS Soil Conservation Technician survey to design a livestock pipeline. Livestock pipelines are part of a larger resource management system to convey water for livestock, reduce energy use, and develop renewable energy systems. Pipelines can be cost shared through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program.

John Mitosinka stands in front of his completed Ag-chemical Handling Facility (AHF). AHF’s are designed to properly store, handle and load all pesticides and liquid fertilizers on the farm in an environmentally safe manner. In 2014, seven AHF’s were built in Shiawassee County through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, and one additional facility is nearing completion. Four are planned to be built in 2015.

Shiawassee River Watershed Targeted for Phosphorus Reduction

The Shiawassee Conservation District (SCD) and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) have partnered with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (MDARD) to deliver the Phosphorus Initiative. This initiative aims to protect the Shiawassee River by promoting and implementing practices that will protect water quality and restore the watershed by reducing the amount of phosphorus entering the Shiawassee River.

SCD and NRCS have been working together to promote sound environmental practices including no-till, nutrient management, filter strips, riparian buffers, and cover crops to achieve this goal. These practices help protect water quality, improve soil health, improve aquatic and wildlife habitat, and enhance recreation. Other benefits include soil erosion prevention, reduced compaction, increased soil organic matter, the capture and redistribution of nutrients in the soil profile, weed suppression, and soil moisture management. Financial assistance is available through the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative and is provided by the NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

“Since 2010, as a direct result of the GLRI conservation planning efforts, 12,807.50 acres of cover crops have been planned, 3,200 acres are or will be no-tilled, and 3,899 acres will be managed for nutrients in the phosphorus area,” stated NRCS District Conservationist Tina Tuller. “These conservation practices are just a few of the many success stories in Shiawassee County.” Pictured is the manure injection equipment that was demonstrated during the SCD Agricultural Tour in September, 2014. The demonstration of this equipment resulted in several farmers deciding to inject manure and several more left considering a switch to no-till.

Contact the Shiawassee Conservation District for more details on conservation planning, and programs that offer technical and financial assistance to implement conservation practices that will protect our natural resources.

On-Farm Secondary Containment Facilities, or Fueling Facilities, can be cost shared through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). They are permanently located aboveground and designed to provide safe storage of on-farm oil products. In order to be eligible for cost share, the current fuel storage must present an environmental resource concern. For EQIP, the maximum tank size is 1,100 gallons, and each facility is allowed up to three tanks. In 2014, five Fueling Facilities were built in Shiawassee County, and four are planned for installation in 2015.

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Farmer of the Year

The Shiawassee Conservation District has awarded the 2014 Conservation Farmer of the Year to Mike Kingsbury and Jason Eicher of Venice Township. Jason said, “It is an honor to have people notice what we are doing. I hope this encourages others to practice conservation.” Mike said, “We are only a representative of this award. There are a lot of farmers worthy.” They will be honored at the Shiawassee Conservation District Annual Meeting Thursday, March 5.

This uncle-nephew duo farms around 1,800 acres, 600 acres of which they own, throughout Venice, Clayton, Flint, Owosso and Fairfield townships. Both men come from long traditions of farming and have both worked on the farm since they were children. The farm used to have dairy cows, horses, lambs and hogs. They have 2 full-time employees, Jeff Ruminski and Eric Higgins.

Jason Eicher is a 1997 Corunna High School graduate. He was involved in FFA and also showed animals through 4-H at the Shiawassee County Fair. He continued his education at MSU where he got a Bachelor’s Degree in Crop and Soil Science. He previously drove trucks, worked for UAP, but then started buying equipment and land and now farms full-time. Although, he also does custom farming, such as spreading lime, etc. Jason and his wife Jody, live in Venice Township with their two sons, Austin and Evan.

Mike Kingsbury is a Corunna High School graduate and a graduate of Denver Automotive Diesel College. He worked at Applegate Chevrolet for 20 years while he farmed, now farming full-time. Mike and his wife Jody, have two children, Adam and Ashley.

The Kingsbury farm produces a 5-6 year crop rotation of sugar beets, corn, soy beans, wheat, rice and black beans using no-till and reduced till farming. No-till farming (also known as zero tillage or direct drilling) is a way of growing crops from year to year without disturbing the soil through tillage. It increases the amount of water that infiltrates into the soil and increases organic matter retention and cycling of nutrients in the soil. Reduced tillage is usually done with a chisel plow and leaves 15-30 percent residue coverage on the soil. Jason added that you can’t no-till sugar beets so they must use reduced tillage. Kingsbury Farms are one of only seven farms in Shiawassee County to harvest sugar beets.

Also on the list of conservation practices they use are aerial seeding of cover crop in Shiawassee County to harvest sugar beets. Kingsbury so they must use reduced tillage. Kingsbury Farms are one of only seven farms in Shiawassee County to harvest sugar beets.

They practice advanced precision nutrient management, and pesticide management in residual nutrients after the harvest of a crop to provide nutrients to the following crops. Also on the list of conservation practices they use are aerial seeding of cover crop in Shiawassee County to harvest sugar beets.

Jason and Mike stated that 2014 was a decent year for some of the corn crops, but not good for the sugar beet crop. The weather prevented them from planting until June 1, two months behind schedule. In response, they plan to plant 1/3 less corn in 2015. Jason said, “We farm because we like it, not because you get rich from doing it.” Mike added, “We have been battling the weather the last three years, we hope 2015 is better.”

2014 Agricultural Tour – The Shiawassee Conservation District (SCD), Shiawassee County Farm Bureau (FB), and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) held their annual Shiawassee County Agricultural Tour Saturday, September 6, 2014. Agriculture is a vital part of Shiawassee County’s economy. The annual tour is a great opportunity for all community members to learn how partnerships between local farmers, SCD, NRCS, and Shiawassee County FB improve crop production while simultaneously protecting our environment. The tour included stops at three diverse farms, including Cindy Garber’s operation pictured above. At this stop, Betsy Dierberger, NRCS State Resource Conservationist joined Cindy to describe how a successful prescribed grazing system operates. Betsy is shown demonstrating how to use a grazing stick to estimate the amount of available dry forage material. Also from this tour and pictured on the cover: Mark Hinterman discussed and demonstrated manure injection at Cole Riverview Farms during one of the tour stops.
FOREST MANAGEMENT = HEALTHY PRODUCTIVE FORESTS

The timber in a forest can easily be worth tens of thousands of dollars; comparable to investments in a home, vehicles, or a retirement portfolio. Even more important to some forest owners are the non-timber values such as wildlife habitat, hunting, beauty, and heritage. Many people seek professional assistance with their valuable assets...why not with their forestland?

Allowing nature to take its course or neglecting forestland will not often produce the greatest benefits for a forest owner. Forest systems are dynamic and ever-changing and so is the social and economic environment in which they exist. Management of forestland is important to assure it will be healthy, productive, and so is the social and heritage. Many people seek professional assistance with their valuable assets...why not with their forestland?

All plans are not the same, by a professional forester. Plans, as well as management activities including controlling brush, controlling invasive species, planting trees, and releasing crop trees. The largest portion of Michigan’s forest belongs to family forest owners. Management of these resources is critical for Michigan’s wildlife as well as the families who own them. For more information about forest management contact the Shiawassee Conservation District.

To help achieve desired outcomes. A Forest Management Plan should be prepared by a professional forester. All plans are not the same, by a professional forester. Plans, as well as management activities including controlling brush, controlling invasive species, planting trees, and releasing crop trees.

Allowing nature to take its course or neglecting forestland will not often produce the greatest benefits for a forest owner. Forest systems are dynamic and ever-changing and so is the social and economic environment in which they exist. Management of forestland is important to assure it will be healthy, productive, and so is the social and heritage. Many people seek professional assistance with their valuable assets...why not with their forestland?

The timber in a forest can easily be worth tens of thousands of dollars; comparable to investments in a home, vehicles, or a retirement portfolio. Even more important to some forest owners are the non-timber values such as wildlife habitat, hunting, beauty, and heritage. Many people seek professional assistance with their valuable assets...why not with their forestland?

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Forest Management is very beneficial for any forestland, no matter the size or type. A Forest Management Plan should be prepared by a professional forester. Plans are not the same, as each owner has their own desires for their forest land and each forest is made up of different plant species, soils, and climate. For these reasons, the forester works closely with the landowner to ensure the plan will meet each individual need.

The Shiawassee Conservation District is a local source for forestry information, including a list of consulting foresters that can be contacted for assistance. In addition, the Conservation District hosts workshops throughout the year covering a variety of forestry related topics.
More than 200 students from Shiawassee County’s FFA program learned about cover crops during the Shiawassee Conservation District’s Annual FFA Agricultural Tour (in partnership with Baker College of Owosso). John Durling, NRCS Plant Materials Center Manager, joined Conservation District staff and local farmer Larry Lee, to speak to the students about the benefits of incorporating conservation practices of no-till and cover crops into a farming operation.

**Groundwater Myths and Facts**

Continued from Page 7

7. Agricultural activities always contaminate groundwater. - False! While some activities such as improper animal waste disposal or excess use of fertilizer or pesticides can contaminate groundwater, many agricultural activities have little or no influence on groundwater.

8. Leaky fuel storage tanks are a hazard to groundwater. - True! Leaking fuel storage tanks can allow gasoline, diesel fuel, oil or other solvents to travel downward through the soil into groundwater.

9. Abandoned wells have little impact on groundwater. - False! An abandoned well is a direct conduit to the groundwater aquifer. Anything that enters the well also enters the groundwater posing serious contamination risks.

10. Michigan has more private household wells than any other state. - True! In Michigan, 1.25 million private wells service 2.6 million citizens, while public water supplies using groundwater serve 1.7 million, making groundwater a crucial natural resource to Michigan residents.

So what can you do to help assure that you are not contributing contamination to the groundwater supply? Conducting an on-farm or in-home risk assessment can help avoid a future problem. The Farm*A*Syst and Home*A*Syst environmental risk reduction programs are free, strictly voluntary and completely confidential. Contact the Conservation District to schedule your risk reduction session today!

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SCD and NRCS Work Together to Protect Natural Resources

The NRCS provides cost-share funds to farmers through the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP). Farmers who complete a Farm*A*Syst or Crop*A*Syst will achieve a higher ranking when they apply for EQIP cost-share funds through the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS). The completion of a Farm*A*Syst or Crop*A*Syst demonstrates that they are concerned about the environment and are willing to make changes in their operation or management practices that will reduce risks to the environment.

In Shiawassee County Farm*A*Systs and Crop*A*Systs are conducted by Shiawassee Conservation District Agricultural Technician Tom Wert. These assessments are confidential, voluntary, and non-regulatory. All materials remain on the farm at the conclusion of the process. The farmer decides which changes, if any, make sense on their farm. The farmer controls how, when, and if the changes are implemented on their farm. Both assessments will help the farmer to be in conformance with applicable Michigan Right to Farm GAAMP's (Generally Accepted Agricultural Management Practices) and in compliance with applicable state and federal environmental regulations and laws.

The Farm*A*Syst is a series of risk questions that will help assess how effectively farmstead structures, management practices, and site conditions protect water resources. These risk questions deal with pesticides, fertilizers, fuel, manure and other possible sources of contamination that are present at the farm site and their possible effect on groundwater and surface water. Where "high risk" practices or situations are identified, alternatives will be explored that could reduce or eliminate that risk. Many times these alternatives are at limited or no expense to the farmer. When high risks are identified, there may also be financial assistance available from NRCS as an incentive to encourage farmers to adopt the lower risk activity into their farm operation. One example of this assistance is an Agronomic Handling Facility (AHF) for the storage of pesticides and liquid fertilizers on the farm. This financial assistance is available through EQIP.

The Crop*A*Syst is a series of risk questions that help to assess how effectively the crop management practices protect soil and water resources on the farm. This assessment will assist in developing and implementing a management plan that prevents loss of soil through water and wind erosion, prevent contamination of water resources and maintain economic crop production. As with the Farm*A*Syst, when high risk situations are identified alternatives will be explored that could reduce or eliminate the risks. Financial assistance or incentives are also available from NRCS when a Crop*A*Syst is completed by the producer.

Examples of eligible EQIP practices include cover crops, deep tillage, nutrient management, pest management, no/till/strip-till and filter strips. All of these practices, which help to reduce soil erosion or prevent water contamination, provide a financial incentive to the producer when they are included in the management of the farm.

To learn more about Farm*A*Systs, Crop*A*Systs and how they can aid in the securing of financial and technical assistance through NRCS EQIP, contact Tom Wert, Agricultural Technician at the Shiawassee Conservation District office.

The Shiawassee Conservation District hosted two Electronic Waste (e-waste) Collections in 2014 in partnership with Comprenex, an electronics recycling company. Both events were highly successful, collecting a total $3,552 pounds of e-waste, keeping thousands of pounds of valuable reusable material out of our landfills! There is a real need in Shiawassee County for an environmentally safe way to recycle e-waste and the Shiawassee Conservation District plans on hosting future collections. Look for details on the District’s website at www.shiawasseeccd.org, facebook page, or in local newspapers. Pictured are Tom Wert, Donna Kanau, and Melissa Higbee, sorting through a portion of the electronics collected during the Shiawassee Conservation District’s E-Waste Collection held in May, 2014.

Conservation Education at YMCA Camp Shiawassee

In 2014, the Conservation District marked the sixth year they brought a conservation education program to the Shiawassee Family YMCA Camp Shiawassee. Last year was especially exciting because it was the second year of a two year grant to educate youth about soil and water conservation through a hands-on garden project.

Funded through a USDA Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program grant, the project involved the campers in planting and caring for vegetable gardens that were installed at the facility. As vegetables were harvested, campers discovered new ways to prepare and consume these healthy treats.

Additionally, the Conservation District visited the camp weekly bringing fun and interactive lessons on various concepts of conservation and sustainable agriculture reaching nearly 700 youth participants. The lessons focused on ecological benefits of conservation and sustainable agriculture. Topics covered included; water conservation, soil biology, pollination, and composting, amongst others. Furthermore, the kids gained social awareness about growing food sustainably and knowledge and confidence to make healthy food choices by growing and preparing their own food.

It has been a pleasure partnering with the Shiawassee Family YMCA to bring this fun and educational program to youth of the county. The Conservation District plans to return to Camp Shiawassee this summer to again help with the gardens and bring many new and exciting activities to the campers. For more information on conservation education programs contact the Conservation District and to learn about Camp Shiawassee, contact the Shiawassee Family YMCA. To view more photos of conservation education at Camp Shiawassee, visit the District’s facebook page!
The Shiawassee Conservation District joined the local agricultural community at Tom Braid’s farm in March 2014 to get a legislative update on agriculture issues. Tom is the Chairman of the Shiawassee Conservation District Board of Directors. Pictured is Tom Wert, SCD Agricultural Technician; Melissa Higbee, SCD District Manager; State Representative Ben Glardon; Andrea Wendt, SCD Watershed Technician; Donna Kanan, SCD Conservation Specialist; and Jay Korson, SCD Agricultural Technician.

The Shiawassee Conservation District and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) proudly partner with the Shiawassee County Farm Bureau to bring a variety of educational opportunities to Shiawassee County residents. A great example of this partnership is Farm Bureau’s Project R.E.D. (Rural Education Day) event. Each year, the Shiawassee Conservation District staff joins other professionals to educate Shiawassee County 2nd graders on conservation, forestry, and agriculture. Pictured are Danielle Santana, SCD Farm Bill Program Assistant, and Katelyn Salowitz, NRCS Soil Conservationist, preparing for their presentation to the 2nd graders on water quality.

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Shiawassee Conservation District and Natural Resources Conservation Service staff, pictured left to right: Andrea Wendt, SCD Watershed Technician; Danielle Santana, SCD Farm Bill Program Assistant; Tina Tuller, NRCS District Conservationist; Tom Wert, SCD Agricultural Technician; Melissa Higbee, SCD District Manager; Jay Korson, SCD Agricultural Technician; Donna Kanan, SCD Conservation Specialist; Greg Lienau, NRCS Soil Conservation Technician; Katelyn Salowitz, NRCS Soil Conservationist.
Success at a No-Till System cannot be achieved merely by stopping tillage. Fields being planned for conversion to a no-till system should be carefully evaluated for conditions which will become inherent problems during the transition phase. The following is a checklist for a field’s readiness for no-till.

1. Use a pooper scooper!
   - Bacteria, parasites, and viruses from pet waste can easily wash into storm drains and end up in the river without being treated.

2. Limit your pesticide and fertilizer use.
   - The ultimate economic incentive from a no-till system comes from improving soil health. Cover crops can increase the rate at which this transformation occurs. Seed appropriate species or mixes immediately after completing harvest or a corrective measure mentioned previously.

3. Adapt Harvest Equipment
   - Combines, grain carts and tractor should be equipped for controlled traffic and/or with floatation tires/tracks. Manage crop residues with a combination of corn head upgrades that adequately crush the stalk at multiple locations and choppers and spreaders that distribute all crop residues evenly as they exit the combine.

4. Drainage
   - Ridges, ruts and gullies will not be corrected by merely switching from fall tillage to no-till. Coordinate corrective measures with above operations where possible.

5. Compaction
   - Check each field at various locations for compacted layers and tillage ridges, ruts and gullies will not be corrected by merely switching from fall tillage to no-till. Coordinate corrective measures with above operations where possible.

6. Control perennial, biannual, and winter annual weeds
   - Weeds that are not controlled by the use of a cover crop. The ultimate economic incentive from a no-till system comes from improving soil health. Cover crops can increase the rate at which this transformation occurs. Seed appropriate species or mixes immediately after completing harvest or a corrective measure mentioned previously.

7. Leveling the field
   - Ridges, ruts and gullies will not be corrected by merely switching from fall tillage to no-till. Coordinate corrective measures with above operations where possible.

8. Drainage
   - Repair, replace, and install new tile systems. Few investments will return more than drainage where drainage is needed.

9. Control perennial, biannual, and winter annual weeds
   - Most of these weeds are best controlled with fall applied herbicides.

10. Soil Fertility
    - Follow the same testing procedures as for pH. High and very high test levels in the 0-3” or low fertility in the 3-6” zone should be addressed through deep (>4”) banding, or incorporation if adequate equipment is not available.

11. Leveling the field
    - The ultimate economic incentive from a no-till system comes from improving soil health. Cover crops can increase the rate at which this transformation occurs. Seed appropriate species or mixes immediately after completing harvest or a corrective measure mentioned previously.

12. Make plans to attend as many winter no-till workshops and roundtables as possible
    - Farmer networks and alliances are born out of these kinds of meetings. Most of the successful long term no-tillers rely on networks.

13. Success at a No-Till System cannot be achieved merely by stopping tillage. Fields being planned for conversion to a no-till system should be carefully evaluated for conditions which will become inherent problems during the transition phase. The following is a checklist for a field’s readiness for no-till.

14. Dozing
    - Manage crop residues with a combination of corn head upgrades that adequately crush the stalk at multiple locations and choppers and spreaders that distribute all crop residues evenly as they exit the combine.

15. Drainage
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16. Control perennial, biannual, and winter annual weeds
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17. Adapt Harvest Equipment
    - Combines, grain carts and tractor should be equipped for controlled traffic and/or with floatation tires/tracks. Manage crop residues with a combination of corn head upgrades that adequately crush the stalk at multiple locations and choppers and spreaders that distribute all crop residues evenly as they exit the combine.

18. Drainage
    - Repair, replace, and install new tile systems. Few investments will return more than drainage where drainage is needed.

19. Control perennial, biannual, and winter annual weeds
    - Most of these weeds are best controlled with fall applied herbicides.

20. Compaction
    - Check each field at various locations for compacted layers and tillage ridges, ruts and gullies will not be corrected by merely switching from fall tillage to no-till. Coordinate corrective measures with above operations where possible.

21. Adapt Harvest Equipment
    - Combines, grain carts and tractor should be equipped for controlled traffic and/or with floatation tires/tracks. Manage crop residues with a combination of corn head upgrades that adequately crush the stalk at multiple locations and choppers and spreaders that distribute all crop residues evenly as they exit the combine.

22. Drainage
    - Repair, replace, and install new tile systems. Few investments will return more than drainage where drainage is needed.

23. Control perennial, biannual, and winter annual weeds
    - Most of these weeds are best controlled with fall applied herbicides.

24. Adapt Harvest Equipment
    - Combines, grain carts and tractor should be equipped for controlled traffic and/or with floatation tires/tracks. Manage crop residues with a combination of corn head upgrades that adequately crush the stalk at multiple locations and choppers and spreaders that distribute all crop residues evenly as they exit the combine.

25. Drainage
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27. Compaction
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    - Combines, grain carts and tractor should be equipped for controlled traffic and/or with floatation tires/tracks. Manage crop residues with a combination of corn head upgrades that adequately crush the stalk at multiple locations and choppers and spreaders that distribute all crop residues evenly as they exit the combine.

29. Drainage
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30. Control perennial, biannual, and winter annual weeds
    - Most of these weeds are best controlled with fall applied herbicides.
In 2014, the Conservation District worked with Environmental Canine Services, LLC to identify E. coli in the Holly Drain Watershed. Seen here is Sable, the first ever canine who has been scent-trained to identify septic waste in stormwater. He is sniffing buckets taken from various sites in the watershed to narrow down the focus of the program.

Ben Glardon
STATE REPRESENTATIVE
Representing the 85th District.
I applaud the members of the Shiawassee Conservation District for continuing to protect Michigan’s valuable natural resources. Contact the District for more information.

Waste and home, leading to a stronger economy and better quality of living for our community. Please support the Shiawassee Conservation District as it works hard to maintain healthy Michigan rivers and lakes.

Keep Drains Clean for Healthier Michigan

Drains and ditches are important conveyers of water to our Great Lakes. It is important not to treat drains and ditches as dumping grounds, cropland, garden areas, or mowed lawn spaces because most are man-made streams that serve many of the same purposes as natural waterways. Flood control, drainage, water resources, and habitats are just a few of the important functions drains and ditches provide.

Land uses, especially streamside activities, have a direct impact on the quality and quantity of water in a drain. Whether it is an urban or agricultural area, all the water that flows across the land to a stream can potentially carry with it pollutants. Trash, oil, gasoline, road salts, sediments, and yard wastes are common pollutants from urban sources, while fertilizers, pesticides, sediments, and crop residues flow from agricultural lands. Impervious surfaces, such as roads and parking lots, speed up the flow of water and contribute to flooding. Cropland with little cover also accelerates the flow of water contributing to soil loss and poor water quality.

Yard waste, trash, food, tires, and other garbage do not belong in drains. Regardless of the way these materials enter drains whether it be through runoff or by intentional dumping, once they are in the drain they either remain to pollute the water and surrounding areas of that waterway or are carried downstream to pollute other surface waters.

It is also strongly discouraged to plow, mow, and/or plant up to the streambank. These activities promote bank erosion, soil loss, and general polluting of the waterway.

Fortunately, there are simple practices that can protect streams, ditches from pollutants, reduce flooding, and enhance the habitat of waterways. Additionally, financial benefits to install these practices on agricultural land may also be available.

Installing a filter strip is one conservation practice that can help protect drains. A filter strip is an area of vegetation planted along a streambank that slows the rate of runoff, captures sediments and organic matter, and helps to filter out pollutants. These riparian plantings can be easily installed in most areas. Planting urban and residential streams with native plants, grasses and wildflowers can create backyard habitats for native birds and butterflies while enhancing natural settings and protecting water quality. Filter strips on agricultural ditches protect fields from flooding while filtering fertilizers, chemicals, and sediments out of water before it enters the stream.

Financial incentives are available for planting filter strips along drainage ways in agricultural areas through the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS). Cost-share for other conservation practices that address erosion and other natural resource concerns are also available through Farm Bill programs.

For more information on types of practices and programs available, or for examples of plants that can help protect water quality, contact the Shiawassee Conservation District at (989) 723-8263, ext 3. Improving water quality locally protects streams that feed our rivers and lakes. The water that leaves your land will ultimately drain to the Great Lakes. The cleaner that water is when it first makes its journey, the healthier Michigan rivers and lakes will be, leading to a stronger economy and better quality of living for our community.
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Conservation Education Programs Available

Conservation Education is integral to the mission of the Shiawassee Conservation District. Conservation Education helps people of all ages understand and appreciate our natural resources and learn how to conserve those resources for future generations. Through structured educational experiences and activities targeted to varying age groups, conservation education enables people to realize how natural resources and ecosystems affect each other and how resources can be used wisely.

Through conservation education, people can develop the critical thinking skills they need to understand the complexities of ecological problems. Conservation Education also encourages people to act on their own to conserve natural resources and use them in a responsible manner by making informed resource decisions.

During 2014, the Conservation District brought Conservation Education to area schools, scout groups, libraries, and YMCA youth camp. The District also taught education sessions to Shiawassee County second graders at the Farm Bureau sponsored Project R.E.D. (Rural Education Day) and at the Michigan Arbor Day Event where 1,500 second and third graders from around the region attended to celebrate Arbor Day.

The Shiawassee Conservation District offers free education programs to schools and groups. Available topics include water quality, soils, forestry, wildlife habitat and many more. Conservation Educational programs are available for all ages from early learning to adult education and can be tailored to meet the needs of your classroom or group. Contact the Conservation District to schedule your program today!