

Barry Conservation District: 2008 Year in Review

It is the mission of the Barry Conservation District “to promote responsible natural resource and land-use management for present and future generations.” To fulfill this mission, the Barry Conservation District Board of Directors develops an annual plan of work based on its assessment of Barry County’s long-range resource needs and concerns. The plan of work prioritizes action items based on program support, public input and community resources. The following summary illustrates the steps taken in 2008 by the Barry Conservation District, with support from its many partners, toward these goals.

Forestry:

Through spring and fall tree sales, the BCD provided over 39,000 trees and shrubs to area residents for reforestation, the equivalent of approximately 70 acres of forest. Over 500 trees were donated to area schools and groups to help celebrate Arbor Day and Earth Week. In 2008, BCD also responded to reports of Gypsy Moth caterpillars re-emerging in Barry County. With the support of the County, areas were surveyed and a Gypsy Moth Suppression Program was established for 2009 (see related article).

Surface Water Quality:

The BCD is still at work on the Thornapple Watershed Management Plan. New data from the MDNR has placed almost the entire watershed on the Total Maximum Daily Load requirement list for mercury and PCB contamination. This has warranted new consideration and revision of the draft plan. The Thornapple Watershed Management Plan is scheduled for completion in April, 2009.

To catalog data from our water quality monitoring projects, the BCD is utilizing www.micorps.net, a database for tracking water quality information throughout the state. Data from 165 points in the Thornapple Watershed Road-stream Crossing Inventory has now been entered into the database, along with 62 entries tracking water quality monitoring. In spring, 2008 the BCD expanded the number of sites monitored for water quality, completing 17 sites from Eaton County to Kent County. The second monitoring session in October also completed 17 sites. The program expanded volunteer membership with the addition of the Thornapple River Watershed Council as partners in the endeavor.

The BCD and many project partners worked with the Village of Nashville and its Dam Committee to take the first steps toward the removal of the Nashville Dam (see related article).

The 2008 annual river clean-up, co-sponsored by the Thornapple River Watershed Council, was far more comprehensive than in the past. Teams were organized in five locations from Nashville to Ada, with extensive bank clean up accompanying the usual on-river activity. Unprecedented local business and volunteer support, including participation by the Village of Nashville, City of Hastings, Village of Middleville and Ada Parks and Recreation made this year’s effort truly a “watershed” event. The lowering of the LaBarge Dam provided an additional opportunity for large item removal in December.

Soils

The District's AmeriCorps Program sponsored the "Don't Guess – Soil Test" project in April and May of 2008. For a \$10 fee, residents had soil samples analyzed at MSU labs to determine soil makeup and fertilizer requirements. The project seeks to discourage over-application of lawn and garden fertilizers.

Through a partnership with the DNR, Ducks Unlimited and Pheasants Forever, the District provides a low-cost no-till seed drill for rent. In 2008, this program helped to establish ninety acres of wildlife habitat and food plots.

Agriculture:

The Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program is a comprehensive, proactive and voluntary agricultural pollution prevention program. Five MAEAP verifications were completed by area farmers in 2007.

Accomplishments in partnership with the Hastings USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service and Barry County Agricultural Preservation Board are highlighted in separate articles in this report.

Education and Outreach:

Educational programming is one of the most important outreach activities undertaken by the BCD. In 2008, staff presented to the Hastings Women's Club, Middleville Green Days and the Lower Grand River Forum, held a workshop in conjunction with the BCD Annual Meeting, presented at the Institute for Learning in Retirement and the Groundwater Stewardship Education and Demonstration Day and conducted workshops on streamside landscaping and erosion control for residents of the City of Hastings.

The BCD has been fortunate this year in receiving much-needed help in developing new contacts with local schools. Presentations on water quality monitoring using macro-invertebrates as indicators were made at Aaron Saari's 9th grade science classes at Maple Valley High School and at Randy Stehlik's 6th grade insect and biology classes at Thornapple-Kellogg Middle School. Additionally, Career Day programs were continued in area schools, and trees and books were donated to Thornapple-Kellogg, Maple Valley and Delton-Kellogg Schools for Arbor Day celebrations.

The BCD publishes weekly articles in the Reminder, along with its Annual Report, which includes updates on all District programs. Coverage of the Nashville Dam Removal was carried in several articles in the Maple Valley News, and the Thornapple River Clean-up saw coverage in many Barry and Kent County publications.