



Conservation District Operations

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Michigan's conservation districts are local units of government that utilize local, state, federal, and private sector resources to deliver conservation programming designed to solve today's agricultural and natural resource problems. The Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (MDARD) Conservation Program staff work to empower conservation districts to sustain, protect, and enhance Michigan's natural resources so they can be recognized as a trusted resource for local conservation solutions supported by stable funding and a network of collaborative partners. Conservation districts are also the primary mechanism by which MDARD conservation programs are delivered to private landowners.

IMPACT FOR MICHIGAN:

The Michigan food and agriculture sector, including the forest product industry, generates more than \$104 billion of total economic activity each year. The sustainable use of our soil, water, and forest resources is critical to ensuring the future of our agriculture and forest products industry. Because conservation programming is most effective when delivered at the local level, by local people, with local technical assistance, MDARD relies on conservation districts to provide delivery of the following programs that help protect and conserve Michigan's natural resources:

- Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program
- Forestry Assistance Program
- Conservation Technical Assistance Initiative
- Michigan Produce Safety Program
- Michigan Phosphorus Initiative

2020 ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- Rewrote the Conservation Districts Operations Manual.
- Development of a five-year strategic plan to prioritize and guide the Conservation Program's work with conservation districts.
- The creation and pilot of a new approach to working with conservation districts to help build operational capacity and provide grant delivery support.
- 193 instances of operational development assistance to conservation districts.
- Certified 29 conservation district elections.
- Grant program delivery support to 55 conservation districts that collectively received nearly \$7 million in grant funding for the delivery of MDARD programs.

MEASURING SUCCESS:

Metric	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Number of conservation districts	77	75	75	75	75
Number of district managers	73	69	70	70	70
Total district staff	244	199	282	241	282
Number of districts receiving ESD grants	61	62	57	52	55
Total number of ESD grants to districts	124	135	127	94	89
Value of ESD grants to districts	\$5.9M	\$6.2M	\$6.65M	\$8.08M	\$6.9M
ESD grant program progress reviews	323	692*	383	501	417
Conservation district board meetings attended	172	127	163	152	183
Conservation district employee search and selection assistance	44	35	40	27	24
Conservation district capacity building assistance	138	135	52	79	193
District employee development assistance	67	51	36	20	49

*Includes financial evaluations from the last quarter of fiscal year 2017 typically counted towards the following fiscal year.

2021 PROGRAM GOALS:

- Foster the development and expansion of the Michigan Conservation Partnership.
- Survey Conservation Programs staff to identify trainings and skills needed for improved delivery of services.
- Strengthen collaboration within the ESD and MDARD to better meet grantees' needs.
- Finalize training plan and development of additional trainings for conservation district directors and staff.
- Expand pilot of new operations review and grant progress review process statewide.
- Support ongoing efforts to restore operational funding to conservation districts.
- Provide tools and support to help conservation districts through the COVID-19 pandemic.



KEY STAKEHOLDERS:

- Conservation district directors and staff
- Michigan landowners
- Federal and state partnering agencies
- Users of Michigan's natural resources

LEGAL AUTHORITY:

- Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act, Public Act 451 of 1994, Part 93 (Soil Conservation Districts), as amended