

Annual Report

Many new and exciting things have been going on at the Tuscola Conservation District Office. My name is Patty McNinch, and I am the District Technician/Education Coordinator.

I am the President of Thumb Nature Areas and through this organization the conservation district is able to provide area schools opportunities to learn about science benchmarks through nature. These field trips are offered to schools in Tuscola County through generous support from Thumb Nature Areas. Funding from Thumb Nature Areas provides transportation and presenters for the field trip once a registration form has been submitted. It is a great way to have students take learning outdoors and helps them build an appreciation for our environment. You can learn more and find field trip forms at thumbnatureareas.com . We would like to thank Farm Bureau and Tuscola Conservation District for their generous donations which allow our organization to provide transportation for these field trips. If you are interested in making a donation to help raise funds for field trip transportation, please contact Patty McNinch by emailing her at patty.mcninch@macd.org or call her at the Tuscola Conservation District Office at 989-325-7057.

Many cleanup projects occurred this past year to help remove invasive species from Indianfields Township Park and in The Exchange Club Forest. We worked in partnership with the Saginaw Bay Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area (CISMA) and area outdoor environmental school groups. Students enjoyed the day out in the woods and were very excited to help keep the environment clean and healthy. We look forward to working with any school groups and the Saginaw Bay CISMA again this year.

A goal of mine is to provide opportunities for community outreach on a variety of topics. These programs are family friendly. This past year some of the programs offered for the community included a Night Hike in February. It was a magical night with the full moon for February adding to the awe and wonder of the evening. Our next Night hike is scheduled for Monday, February 2nd, 2026, if you want to come experience the magic! Another activity from this past year was a four-part program titled "Color Our World" which we partnered with the Caro Area District Library. This program kicked off with a visit to the Caro botanical garden where participants submitted pictures of all the different colors they could find in the garden to the library and a slide show was created for anyone to enjoy, Next the group visited the Caro Farmers Market and colored the sidewalk with chalk to bring a colorful welcome to the farmers market visitors, then a nature craft activity using all things from nature to make a work of art was enjoyed by everyone, and finally, a nature journaling experience was given to participants to show their artistic side by drawing about their nature immersion experience. Our office participated in the Exchange Club Forest Annual Trail Walk which was a fun day to hike the trails and this year's trail walk will be in August 2026. The Audubon Christmas Bird Count was an exciting event again this year. There were many enthusiastic participants that braved the cold,

snowy day to count birds. I would like to thank them for their dedication and expertise in this important event. We will participate again this coming year. If you are interested in participating in the Christmas Bird Count, please contact Patty McNinch.

Community Outreach is an integral component of our office's main goals. Some ways this can be achieved is through bringing knowledge of different conservation topics to members of our community. This past year I had the opportunity to meet with many different organizations and groups on a variety of different topics. There were several dates when our office staff met with middle school and high school students to give them opportunities to ask questions about a career in conservation and how to pursue careers in conservation. The state-wide Envirothon program was organized through our office and the Michigan Association of Conservation Districts. Envirothon gives high school students an opportunity to learn about environmental topics and compete with other schools at the state level. The winning team for Michigan then competes at the national competition. Our office staff presented for the annual "Project Red" event sponsored by Farm Bureau and spoke to third graders from Tuscola County. Nature study activity ideas were presented to parents for getting outdoors with children. Visitations to organizations requesting help with forestry, native species, soil characteristics, and other conservation topics were part of this past years events.

Community outreach also included presenting different programs on a variety of topics to anyone interested in learning more about how to be conservation minded and on how to put conservation practices into action. Staff from our office offered opportunities for high school students to learn more about careers in conservation by attending several career day events. Several parent groups participated in group presentations to learn how to use conservation activities and practices in their homes and family. Several home school groups had several opportunities this past year to have educational programs offered to their families and children. Many public and private schools took advantage of the different educational programs our office offers. Presentations for the Caro Garden Club, Educators and interested organizations provided learning opportunities for a variety of participants. We appreciate being able to bring conservation to life through all these different activities.

Our office has continued its partnerships with the Caro Area District Library, The Exchange Club Forest, MSU 4-H Extension, Indianfields Township Park, Chippewa Landing, and Darbee Park that made our programs possible this past year. We encourage everyone to visit the Caro Area District Library website at carolibrary.org or the Conservation District website at tuscolacd.com for information about all the upcoming community programs. Thank You to all the wonderful partners!

The NACD poster contest for 2026 will begin February 2026. The 2026 theme is “Soil Where it all Begins!” and will be focused on the characteristics of soil and why it’s so important to keep it healthy here in Michigan. School presentations are being scheduled right now. If your school would like to participate in the 2026 poster contest and would like to set up a presentation on any conservation topic for your classroom or school, please contact Patty McNinch by emailing her at patty.mcninch@macd.org or call her at the Tuscola Conservation District Office at 989-325-7057. We are looking forward to seeing many wonderful posters again this coming year!

Our office is also promoting the Michigan Green Schools program for Tuscola County schools. The Michigan Green Schools program was established as a statewide program by Michigan’s Public Act 146 of 2006. It operated as an independent 501c3 organization for 16 years and is now housed within the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy’s Environmental Education Program.

Michigan Green Schools is dedicated to assisting all Michigan schools public and private achieve environmental goals that include protecting the air, land, water and animals of our state through promotion of good ecological practices and environmental stewardship by students’ pre-kindergarten through high school. If your school is interested in more information regarding the Michigan Green Schools program, please visit the thumb nature areas website at thumbnatureareas.com or contact Patty McNinch by emailing her at patty.mcninch@macd.org or call her at the Tuscola Conservation District Office at 989-325-7057.

Thank you so much for your continued support of the Tuscola Conservation District. I look forward to hearing from you and to having another wonderful year!