

BENZIE CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Annual Report 2017



Our mission is to preserve and enhance the natural resources of Benzie County

Aquatic Invasive Species Pathways Project allows BCD staff to clean all types of watercraft with state-of-the-art boat washing station

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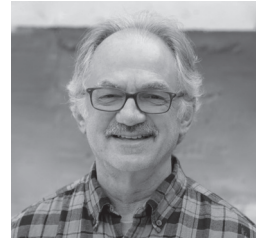
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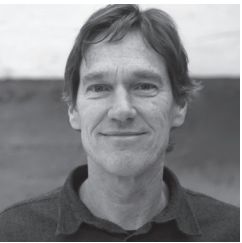


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Species Coordinator*



Jodi Monteith
*Aquatic Invasive
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Kama Ross
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*Invasive Species
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Lizzy Freed
*MAEAP
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Wyatt Bostitch
District Intern

*A Huge Thanks to
Our Volunteers,
Partners & Supporters*



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District News: Globalization in a Local District

Globalization: it's a term widely used to define the growing "smallness" of our earth. I don't remember exactly when I first heard the concept and its meaning, but it had to be 30 years ago if it was a day. A generation ago people generally referred to globalization as it related to the world economy and its trades and transactions of monetary goods and services across borders. Today, the concept has broadened to entail environmental challenges such as global warming, cross-boundary water and air pollution, and overfishing of the oceans.

Closer to home, in our very own Benzie County, we are being negatively impacted by a particular strain of globalization: terrestrial and aquatic invasive plants, fungi, animals and insects. For example, most of our ash trees have fallen to the emerald ash borer which came from Asia. And it looks like our beech trees will meet the same fate due to a necrotic fungus accidentally introduced to the U.S. via European nursery stock.

Out in our local waterways, we have zebra mussels (from southern Russia), quagga mussels (Ukraine), and Eurasian Watermilfoil (Eurasia) to name a few. As we stare down these challenges, your local con-

servation district is working both behind the scenes and out on the front lines to make an impact. And that's why the Benzie Conservation District sought and received in February of this year, a \$155,000 grant to hire staff and purchase two portable boat-washing units to tackle the aquatic invasives issue. It's a big task, but what is more important in our local natural environment than the health of our lakes and streams? Jane Perrino and Jodi Monteith, new to the BCD staff this spring, cleaned some 660 boats over a three-county area and also interacted with another 1,800 boaters with information and education about the spread of these ecology-changing invasive plants and animals. We're going for another grant that will broaden the effort to include Benzie, Manistee, Leelanau and Grand Traverse counties. All in all, we've had a breakout year in 2017 and plan to keep the pedal to the metal in the upcoming year!

We pledge to do the very best we can with the resources we have and those resources include you! A HUGE "thank you" to all the supporters, volunteers and givers out there who support our efforts to act as stewards of our local, natural environment. Let us know if there's anything we can do to help make your natural surroundings more verdant, robust, and native!

All the best,



Tad Peacock, Executive Director

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Aquatic Invasive Species team, Jodi Monteith & Jane Perrino, clean out the boat washing station

Invasive Species Network *by Katie Grzesiak*

2017 was a very productive year for the Northwest Michigan Invasive Species Network (ISN) as we continued protecting, enhancing, and promoting northwest Michigan's natural communities through terrestrial invasive plant management and outreach. With funding through the US Forest Service, US EPA (both grants from the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative) and the Michigan Invasive Species Grant Program (through the Quality of Life departments MDNR, MDEQ, and MDARD), we were able to accomplish a lot. Donations and cost-share funds made even more projects possible (thank you!). Projects in our Benzie, Grand Traverse, Leelanau, & Manistee county service area have come to a close, and ISN workers and volunteers were quite the busy bees!

As usual, spring saw us scrambling in the woods after garlic mustard. Workbees and garlic mustard-themed lunches were accompanied by a garlic mustard paper-making event! It was a fun experience to get people involved in re-using discarded materials AND using invasive species. We continued workbees throughout the summer, focusing on baby's breath at Elberta Beach



A growing garlic mustard pile!

in Benzie County. It's amazing how much of a difference a group of volunteers can make!

ISN's groundbreaking Go Beyond Beauty program to

voluntarily remove invasive ornamental plants from trade grew in 2017. We opened the program from just nurseries and landscapers to anyone maintaining a landscape—businesses, garden clubs, governments, and private landowners. We nearly doubled our participation with 16 new groups! We provided participants signage, and increased the educational materials we typically share with garden professionals. Most notably, we created and distributed a rack card explaining why Japanese barberry wasn't available.

We helped remove the invasive ornamental, Japanese barberry, from many landscapes—mainly through a trade-up “dumpster day” program for private landowners. Participants removed barberry and brought them to ISN for disposal in exchange for a \$5 coupon to a participating Go Beyond Beauty

ISN in 2017:

- Surveyed over 1,700 acres of high-quality habitats for top 20 invasive species at over 300 sites
- Worked over 1,000 miles of road, 34 mi Great Lakes shoreline, 40 mi inland lake shoreline, and 100 river-miles
- Restored over 35 acres with native plants
- Treated 340+ acres of high-priority invasive species at 175 sites
- Coordinated 12 workbees and 52 other events
- Engaged over 140 volunteers for 360 volunteer hrs
- Contacted over 1,700 people directly; 383,900+ indirectly
- Responded to Early Detection reports:
 - 1 true giant hogweed (re-treated), 1 true black jetbead
 - 7 new non-native species (previously unrecorded)
 - Dozens of responses to mistaken reports handled over the phone/email

professional. They were able to use these coupons to purchase a non-invasive alternative. To support local businesses, ISN also hosted a “buy-back program” to remove and replace barberry in business landscapes with native plants. In all, over 270 Japanese barberry plants were removed from landscapes.

On-the-ground work continued with a team of Survey Technicians looking for new and expanding infestations of plants in our region. We also carried out a lot of treatments, both of large source populations of knotweed, Phragmites, and also smaller populations of barberry, Phragmites, knotweeds, and Oriental bittersweet to prevent them from turning into large infestations. Finally, we worked with partners to do restoration: plant and protect native plants in areas that had been treated previously or were in need of native plants to help out-compete invasive species.

Our grant success allowed us to bring on an additional full-time staff member: Rebecca Koteskey has been working hard since March as ISN's Communications Specialist. Rebecca lives in Benzie County, and her previous two seasons with ISN made it an easy transition. We're excited to have Rebecca, and all the expertise and enthusiasm she brings, on the ISN team.

If you have questions, want to get involved, or wish to schedule an engaging presentation to a school group, garden club, interest group, local government, or other, contact Katie Grzesiak at kgrzesiak@gtcd.org or (231) 941-0960 x29 or visit HabitatMatters.org.

Aquatic Invasive Species Pathways by Jane Perrino

This region of Michigan is known for high quality lakes and streams, a draw for water recreation. With a high density of surface water in Benzie County, our risk of resource impact is great. To help protect inland water bodies in Benzie, Leelanau, and Manistee counties, the Benzie Conservation District launched its first ever aquatic invasive species (AIS) initiative in 2017. The District's "Aquatic Invasive Species Pathways Project" (AISPP) has just completed a successful first season in the field, funded through the Michigan Invasive Species Grant Program.

Unintentional introduction of AIS can take many pathways: bilge water, bait and bait buckets, mucky water from a kayak, the underside of wader boots, anchors, and even the wheel wells on trailers to name a few. As awareness of this potential damage to aquatic habitats and organisms increases, our hope at the District is for the public to take greater care with their recreational activities. Boaters can help protect their favorite places through the following resources: use of nonmobile, washing stations at Crystal and Glen lakes; our mobile boat washing trailers; rinsing at self-serve car washes; and even air-drying gear for 10-14 days.

Each week, from early May through September, the AISPP team headed to public boat launches to provide educational boat wash events with a mobile boat wash unit. Complete with its own fresh water source, power, and wastewater recycling system, the mobile unit effectively decontaminated watercraft with heated, pressurized water. In addition to boat washing, the District's staff engaged recreational boaters and anglers on the subject of aquatic invasive species transfer: over 1,800 people were educated directly, more than 20,000 indirectly, and 660 boats were washed by the AISPP staff and volunteers. We were pleased to find that response in this region to boat washing efforts and AIS prevention was overwhelmingly positive.

Aside from work at launches, staff provided education through public speaking, media outreach, collaboration on partner events across three counties, and will continue to build a strong network of information between stake-holders. As the season progressed, the need for survey data of AIS at boat launches became apparent, and the AISPP team was able to provide valuable data to its partnering lake associations.



Jodi Monteith, AIS Educator, preps a bass boat for its next fishing trip by spraying off any aquatic hitchhikers!

Yet clearly our lakes and streams are under fire, since most of us are no stranger to zebra mussels (*Dreissena polymorpha*), Eurasian watermilfoil (*Myriophyllum spicatum*), and sea lampreys (*Petromyzon marinus*).

If AIS are already here, isn't it too late? The answer is "no." By containing and reducing the spread of AIS to new lakes and streams, we improve our ability to manage the current problems. Our region still has some of the most beautiful and healthy water systems in the US. Help us to keep it that way by remembering, and sharing, "Play - Clean - Go!" With prevention in mind, our program aspires to advance public water ethics. Aldo Leopold said it best, "The real substance of conservation lies not in the physical projects of government, but in the mental processes of its citizens."

For more information please contact Jane Perrino, AIS Coordinator, jane@benziecd.org, 231.882.4391; or visit the AIS website page: <https://www.benziecd.org/aquatic-invasive-species.html>

Pathways Numbers 2017:

- Spoke with boaters from 16 states: MI, IL, IN, WI, MN, OH, IA, AR, FL, GA, TX, MO, CO, MT, NY, VA
- Washed at 25 boat launch sites; on 17 lakes, and 3 rivers
- Washed: 445 paddled watercraft / 96 fishing boats / 83 sail boats / 15 speed boats / 11 pairs of waders / 6 pontoons / 5 jet-skis
- 80% compliance among boaters to wash their watercraft
- Educated 1,846 boaters directly; 29,000+ public indirectly
- Collaborated with 4 water race events, 4 special events & parades, 4 children's camps and field trips
- Reported AIS locations to online database, Midwest Invasive Species Information Network:

zebra mussels (*Dreissena polymorpha*), Eurasian watermilfoil (*Myriophyllum spicatum*), quagga mussels (*Dreissena bugensis*), and rusty crayfish (*Orconectes rusticus*)

Waterways *by John Ransom*

Benzie County is home to some of the most sought after, high quality water bodies in the state. Whether canoeing the Platte River, sailing on Crystal Lake, salmon fishing the Betsie, or enjoying one of Benzie's world class freshwater beaches, there is no shortage of opportunities to enjoy our water resources.

The BCD remains dedicated to preserving our most valuable resource. With watershed management plans developed for all three Benzie watersheds, the BCD has turned its focus to securing funds



A group of paddlers observe an eagle's nest during the Lake Ann water tour in June 2017.

Water Quality by the Numbers!

- 213 hours of technical assistance in water quality assessment and invasive plant treatments
- Helped collect over 2,800 water quality data points throughout the county
- 360 volunteer hours from 68 volunteers who participated in river cleanup and volunteer stream monitoring events
- Direct contact with 390 students and 350 adults regarding Benzie County's water quality

to implement high priority projects to help clean and protect our waterways. We continue to enhance our role as a local leader in water-related education in our school systems, technical assistance for local lake associations, and providing volunteer opportunities for citizen scientist and conservationist. In 2018, we expect it to be another banner year for preserving and enhancing our watery resources!

Education & Outreach *by Aimé Merizon*

BCD's education and outreach includes being able to be flexible with our communities needs and interests. Each year we find there are different events that evolve just because people ask for our help and information on various topics.

In 2017, we co-hosted a snowshoe hike and then again, a fall color tour hike with the Michigan Legacy Art Park. We also sponsored a spring hike at Pete's Woods; a popular event to get people outdoors!

The Benzie County Central High School environmental group, BCIA (Benzie: Conserve, Inspire, Adapt) went on a very informative fieldtrip to the American Waste facility in Traverse City. This trip was also open to the community and approximately 40 people benefitted from this outing. Understanding what is happening to our trash and recyclables is also a big part of our newest effort called the Benzie Plastics Awareness Collective. We were contacted by two local groups to give a presentation on the state of plastics and how we can start to live a "zero waste" lifestyle.

Other events included a workshop on worm bin composting; presenting a monarch booth at the Beulah Kick-Off Summer Festival; Earth Day events at Lake Ann Elementary; the Adopt-A-Beach Cleanup at Elberta Beach; and a Pasture Walk at the May Farm in Frankfort.

BCD's environmental day camp, Nuts 4 Nature, was held at the Oliver Art Center in Frankfort this year. The program continues to serve locals and visitors alike and gives kids an opportunity to learn and practice good stewardship for our beautiful area!



Fiscal Year Finances 2016 - 2017

REVENUE

Grants	\$58,113.00
Donations	\$2,218.00
Tree sales	\$10,357.00
Other sales & services	\$12,528.00
Tax revenue	\$116,781.00
Other revenue	\$19,467.00
TOTAL REVENUE	\$219,464.00

EXPENSES

General operations	\$211,248.00
Cost of goods	\$7,301.00
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$218,549.00

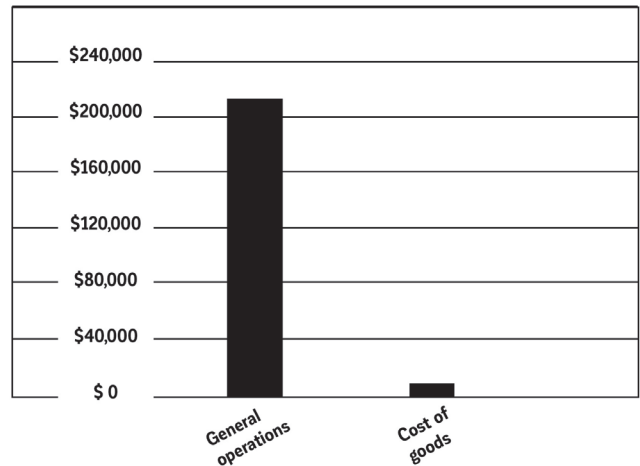
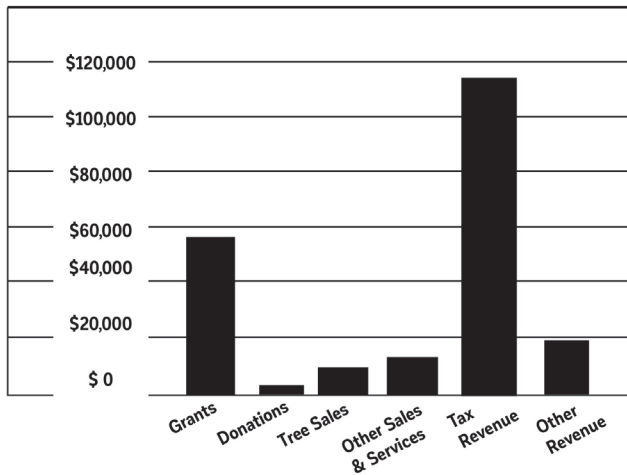
**Data above is for period October 1, 2016 to September 30, 2017 and is unaudited.*

REVENUE PERCENTAGES

Grants	26%
Donations	1%
Tree sales	5%
Other sales & services	6%
Tax revenue	53%
Other revenues	8%

EXPENSE PERCENTAGES

General operations	97%
Cost of goods	3%



All the programs, workshops, and services, including walk-ins and phone calls, provided by the BCD this year directly engaged approximately 2,000 members of our community!

Natural Resource Conservation Service *by Scott Hughey*

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), an agency in the United States Department of Agriculture, works with private landowners to install or implement conservation practices on their land. We are an agency of resource professionals (foresters, biologist, engineers, planners, etc.) who partner and work directly with and through your local conservation district. All assistance with NRCS is voluntary. You, as the landowner, can start and stop your interaction with NRCS at any time. Our one and only job is to educate and assist landowners with installing conservation practices. NRCS has been working with farmers, ranchers, rural landowners and conservation districts since 1935.

This year the NRCS staff worked with Benzie County farmers and landowners to solve conservation resource concerns (problems) on their land. Below is a list of different conservation practices that NRCS assisted farmers and landowners in implementing in Benzie County during 2017:

- Cover Crops – 15.0 Acres
- Nutrient Management – 94.9 Acres
- Integrated Pest Management – 94.9 Acres
- Invasive Species removed – 42.5

NRCS assisted with 14 applications for Farm Bill Conservation Programs, 4 of those for Benzie County. Total dollar value of those funded applica-



tions is \$122,957.85 total, with Benzie's share being \$37,684.00 for 2017. All applications for FY 2017 were funded.

These dollars will be used by landowners to offset the cost of implementing conservation practices on the landscape in Benzie County.

The 2014 Farm Bill provides to farmers and landowners an opportunity to offset the cost of implementing conservation practices, by providing NRCS technical staff and expertise, as well as financial assistance to offset the price tag.

If you would like to learn more about NRCS and financial assistance through the Farm Bill, please contact the Benzie Conservation District for more information. NRCS field staff work out of the Benzie Conservation District Office on Tuesdays, or you can contact the NRCS field office in Bear Lake at 231 889.9666 or by email: scott.hughey@mi.usda.gov.

MAEAP News *by Lizzy Freed*

2017 was a year of new grower contacts and increased verifications for the Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP).

In 2017, "Team MAEAP" facilitated 66 farm environmental risk assessments, and the new verification of 21 farms in Antrim, Benzie, Grand Traverse, and Leelanau Counties; bringing our total verifications to 194!

Benzie County had two new verifications: Blue Sky Hops was verified in the Farmstead and Cropping Systems. 15 new environmental risk assessments were completed in Benzie County. Join along on our accomplishments throughout the year, by following us on Twitter: @Team_MAEAP.



Benzie Conservation District obtains MAEAP verification for the Maley property through the new forestry program.

Forestry Update *by Kama Ross*

I just finished up my fourth full year as your District Forester and a lot is happening with our forests – some great forest management happening and some very impactful forest health issues of concern. Overall, our county’s forests are productive and putting on some of the most valuable growth as many of our second growth forests are maturing. Along with our aging trees, stressors both native and non-native are making sustainable forest management a challenge.

Many beech trees are dying from the stress of the beech scale insect and from the full blown Beech Bark Disease. The gap in the forest canopy, the loss of beech nuts for mast, and the “beech thickets” left behind in the understory of our northern hardwoods stands, are all a problem that we are trying to work with. Not easy! Many landowners are trying to pre-salvage their beech saw logs and the market is not strong or large enough to accept the volume coming out of our northern woods. Coupled with ash borer and oak wilt, the health of our forests is a huge part of every conversation on site visits, a topic of workshops and a question from almost all calls to our District offices. I appreciate the interest and concern that so many express when they seek technical assistance. I just wish I had more answers or solutions to offer. I do try to bring the best scientific research and in-the-field experience to help make wise management decisions.

2017 saw an increase in the number of landowners enrolling their forested property in the property tax savings offered through the Qualified Forest Program. If you own 20 acres or more of forestland that is not claimed as your permanent residence, you can save substantially on your property taxes. The program is for landowners interested in active forest management and harvesting timber from your property, in exchange for a reduction of 16 mils on their property tax.

As always, my role as District Forester is to help you make your forest work for you...whether it is enjoying recreational pursuits, seeking wild edibles, planting new trees and shrubs, harvesting red pine or hardwoods or enhancing the habitat for a slew of wildlife species. On-site technical assistance is provided at no charge. Let’s set up a visit this coming year!

Contact Kama Ross at 231-256-9783; or email: kama.ross@macd.org.

FY2016-17 Benzie County

- 94 office initial contacts
- 50 landowner site visits covering 1,533 acres
- 175 landowner follow-up contacts
- 22 landowner referrals to consultant and industry foresters covering 450 acres
- 3 landowner referrals to NRCS covering 70 acres
- 8 forest management plans to be written through referrals covering 575 acres
- 19 landowner referrals for timber harvest covering 420 acres
- 38 regional outreach educational events reaching 1,535 area landowners
- 27 regional media occurrences (newsprint, web, radio, tv)



Color Tour hikers included Judy & Sandy the dog; Aimé Merizon, Outreach Coordinator; District Forester, Kama Ross; and visitor Jodi. The group identified fall trees & fungi, leaf shapes, and enjoyed the Michigan Legacy Art Park installations and views.



We had a wonderful
time working
with you in 2017!

