

ANNUAL REPORT

~ 2021 ~



Kama Ross, Regional Forester (started 2013—retired 2021), at Lake Ann Pathway Trail



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

Board of Directors



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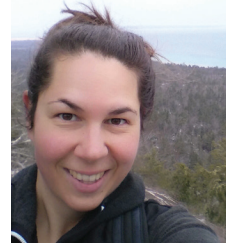
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*Conservation
Specialist*



Jane Perrino
*Aquatic Invasive
Species Coordinator*



Jodi Monteith
*Aquatic Invasive
Species Educator*



Kama Ross
*District Forester
(newly retired)*



Ellie Johnson
District Forester



Mary Roth
Forestry Intern



Scott Hughey
*NRCS District
Conservationist*



Audrey Menninga
*Invasive Species
Network Specialist*



Morgan Noffsinger
District Intern



Jamie Robinson
AIS Technician



Erin Teubner
*District Intern &
AIS Technician*



Samantha Wolfe
AIS Technician

Thank You to Our Partners,
Supporters & Volunteers!



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Transition

“Transition” is a common word that’s likely overused these days. Out on the street we’ve made a transition from warm greetings and hugs to staying six feet apart and wearing masks... here at the office the BCD staff has transitioned from working on-site to working from home, then creating a hybrid of both. We’ve had to adapt. And while we’ve all had to transition into behaviors that we’re not used to, soon if all goes well, we’ll be able to transition into something resembling the “new” normal.

At least one person we’ve had the honor to work with over the past eight years was able to effortlessly transition and adapt to conditions presented by these unusual times: Kama Ross, our District Forester. Kama started in the spring of 2013, coming from the Wexford Conservation District. She has covered Benzie, Grand Traverse and Leelanau counties, putting her substantial knowledge of our forest lands to good use, helping landowners identify pests, diseases and other detriments to a healthy woodlot. She also advised on solid forest management plans and was instrumental in helping to survey and mitigate Oak Wilt disease in our area.

The past tense is being used here because September 30 was Kama’s last day as a district forester. She is transitioning into a well-earned retirement from

work in the woods, but she’s not done yet! Kama has plans to return to the peace corps service in Ghana when Covid restrictions allow. She has been accepted into a agro-forestry position where she will be working with families to help them grow their food under sustainable practices. So, while the northern Michigan forests will miss Kama’s keen eye for a healthy eco-system, Ghana will gain a woman committed to her journey of helping others.

All is not lost for the BCD in the forestry department, however! Our new forester, Ellie Johnson, recently graduated from Clemson with an M.S. in Forestry Resources. Ellie will pick up the mantel and forge ahead with giving landowners information that will best help them maximize the value and health of their forests.

Sending our best wishes to Kama! We’ll miss you. And hello there, Ellie! Welcome to the BCD.

All the Best,

Tad Peacock, Executive Director

ANNUAL MEETING

Tues, November 18, 2021 @ 4:00 pm

~ Zoom Gathering ~

Link available on our website: www.benziecd.org



*Enjoy our
“Home Video”
from the folks
at the District!*



Invasive Species Network *by Audrey Menninga*

Last year we were thanking everyone for their support during our layoffs due to COVID-19 and this year we'd like to thank everyone for their support during a year when almost half our staff has moved on to new opportunities. Despite being short staffed, projects, presentations, and events have continued on-time! We successfully completed our hemlock woolly adelgid (HWA) survey season between January and April before seamlessly moving into our treatment and survey season, assisting partners, communities, and private landowners throughout Manistee, Benzie, Leelanau, and Grand Traverse counties – all while providing workshops, webinars, presentations, and invasive species outreach to the public.

During ISN's HWA season this year, our team was able to survey 234 sites and 1140 acres, even reaching out to assist our Mason-Lake partners for a few days of surveys in Mason County. While our HWA team found no detections, our partners at Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore detected it in Benzie County. This detection was the first for ISN's service area. Treatments were conducted as soon as possible, and private landholders around the campground were asked to participate in ISN's survey efforts. Currently, there have been no further detections within ISN's service area.

Thanks to the Michigan Invasive Species Grant Program, we were able to hire two survey technicians. Our techs were busy out on rivers, lakes, roads, and public and private properties—they were able to survey 148 sites and 4169.5 acres. Fortunately, no early detection species were found! Our treatment crew kept busy focusing on our priority species of garlic mustard, invasive knotweeds, invasive bittersweet, black swallow-wort, Chinese yam, butterbur, and phragmites. We were able to treat over 600 acres and over 300 sites.

Shelly Stusick, Go Beyond Beauty Specialist, spent the year collaborating with staff, partners, and the community to grow the program in our service area. Thirteen new Go Beyond Beauty participants have been added to the program, all committing to not use high-priority ornamental invasive species in their businesses and gardens. Community participants added this year were comprised of landowners, businesses, or organizations who took advantage of Go Beyond Beauty Achievement Levels. An Instagram account and a Facebook page were created for the program to promote participants specifically, as well as highlight ornamental invasive species and native plants in gardens. Our Japanese Barberry Trade-Up Events in June were a success, with almost 300 plants disposed of properly from 5 surrounding counties and 138 coupons distributed for replacement plants from participating Go Beyond Beauty businesses.

Additionally, an advisory committee was created this year to help Go Beyond Beauty expand statewide, comprised of partners of different backgrounds around the state. Although plans have been altered this year, we're planning to begin the state-wide expansion this winter! Stay tuned for more information about new Go Beyond Beauty 'Hubs' and the statewide expansion.

Due to the loss of our Coordinator and Outreach Specialist, we ask for everyone's continued patience and understanding if it takes us longer than normal to respond to inquiries. We also apologize as we cut back on presentations due to being understaffed. Feel free to contact any of us with questions or concerns!

Audrey Menninga (Invasive Species Specialist)
amenninga@gtcd.org
www.habitatmatters.org

Shelly Stusick (Go Beyond Beauty Specialist)
sstusick@gtcd.org
www.habitatmatters.org/go-beyond-beauty

ISN's work is funded in part through grants from the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (administered by the US Forest Service and the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians), the Michigan Invasive Species Grant Program (www.Michigan.gov/invasives), and the Good Neighbor Authority (a partnership of the US Forest Service and Michigan DNR), as well as cost-share from landowners and generous donations from supporters.

ISN in 2020/2021: Fun Facts

- Surveyed 4,471.5 acres
- Treated over 600 acres of high priority species
- Engaged over 150 volunteers -thanks to all our supportive volunteers!
- Had 3,620 contacts, with almost 400 new contacts
- 2 webinars, 3 workshops, 3 public meetings/hikes, 5 workbees, 3 trainings
- 9 out of 13 new participants utilizing Go Beyond Beauty Achievement Levels!
- 292 Japanese barberry plants disposed of throughout Japanese Barberry Trade-Up week, with 138 coupons distributed
- Reached over 650,000 people through website and social media sites.

Aquatic Invasive Species by Jane Perrino

The Aquatic Invasive Species Pathways Program (AISPP) had a packed season, reaching new locations and providing more services than ever. We'd like to thank and acknowledge the dozens of volunteers who committed over 200 hours to conduct aquatic plant surveys and provide AIS outreach to boaters. It's wonderful to see our mission to protect the beautiful waters of northern Michigan and prevent the spread of aquatic invasive species continue its momentum.

AISPP activities this past year included public education and outreach, boat wash events, aquatic plant surveys, shoreline habitat surveys, lake monitoring, updating aquatic invasive species (AIS) signage at launch sites, providing workshops and trainings, collaborations with water recreation race and fishing events, and answering AIS inquiries.

This was a season of several firsts. We had our first field crew and managed more partner collaborations for boat wash events thanks to their efforts. James Robinson, Erin Teubner, and Samantha Wolfe worked alongside program staff in accomplishing program objectives. The AISPP also expanded to serve Grand Traverse county in addition to Benzie, Leelanau and Manistee. Our team also detected new populations of invasive pink water lilies on two Benzie lakes (Long and Little Platte), indicating a possible need for expansion of our AIS outreach. We also offered AIS sign improvement and installation services at public and private boat launch sites.

In 2021 the AISPP operated with financial support from several sources: the Benzie Conservation District millage, the Michigan Invasive Species Grant Program, partnership with the Huron-Manistee National Forest, a Clean Boats, Clean Waters grant and contributions from Benzie County townships (Almira, Benzonia, Blaine, Crystal Lake, Homestead and Lake).

For more info contact AIS Coordinator, Jane Perrino: jane@benziecd.org, 231.882.4391. For education event inquiries contact AIS Educator, Jodi Monteith: jodibcd@gmail.com.

Team technician Jamie displays a dense plant sample during a vegetation survey on Upper Herring Lake.



Invasive pink water lily detected in Long Lake, Benzie County (as well as Little Platte Lake), likely a water landscaping escapee.



CLEAN BOATS

Our team and partners washed a total of **431** watercraft and educated many more boaters on **14** lakes, and **2** rivers

MONITORING

5 Benzie lakes were monitored by our team this summer

7 Chemical & vegetation (including *INVASIVE*) surveys completed for each lake

VOLUNTEERS

We were joined in the field by new and return volunteers **43** Who gave their time to survey and educate **202** HRS

EDUCATION

Our "Aquatic Invasive Species Pathways Program" staff participated in or hosted **40** special events this year, directly engaging **4,644** people and indirectly educating over **22,600** public through various forms of media.

Waterways *by John Ransom*

Reflecting back at all the work we have done in the last year I am torn between feeling like it has been a return to our roots and a blossoming of new growth. As the Conservation Specialist at the Benzie Conservation District (BCD) my job is like water, constantly forming to the needs of Benzie County. This year we needed to get back to something familiar, and I have enjoyed coordinating our flagship volunteer programs, the Platte and Betsie River Clean Sweeps and our Volunteer Stream Monitoring Program. I was also glad to be back leading the Salmon in the Classroom/Leave No Trace field trips down the Platte River with the local 7th graders and hosting a paddle tour of Herendeene Lake in Almira Township. Joining with our volunteers to clean 250 pounds of trash out of the Betsie and Platte or showing a group of schools kids the value of our waterways, was perhaps just as healing for us as it was the rivers.

I also reflect back at the consistent work we do with our partners. These are deep growing roots of our protection of Benzie's natural resources. Every two weeks for the last six years I've had the opportunity to probe the Platte River Watershed, monitoring the health of the watershed with the Platte Lake Improvement Association. And every month in the summer I am tracking the conditions on Crystal and Herring lakes. Although the projects may change year to year, the partnerships remain constant.

2021 has also been a year for new growth. We were able to help cultivate the blossoming career of our summer intern and Benzie Central graduate, Morgan Noffsinger as she helped lead a project to track the sources of bacterial contamination in Crystal Lake. We have also sprouted a new partnership with our drone program, working with Inner-coastal to map and monitor erosion and plants along the Lake Michigan shoreline. Additionally, for the first time this year I worked with property owners on Rush Lake to remove large stands of invasive Phragmites along their shoreline.

2021 was a year to plant our feet in the ground and spring into the next stage of preserving and protecting our beautiful natural resources.

For more information on our work with Benzie waterways, or other services, please contact John Ransom, Conservation Specialist, at 231.882.4391 x 13; john@benziecd.org.



Mentoring the Leave No Trace 7th graders on being good watershed stewards.



Morgan Noffsinger, BCD Intern, drives the boat to help collect water samples.



Honoring our star volunteer, Norm Fred, at the Platte River Clean Sweep.

Fiscal Year 2021 Finances*

REVENUE

Contributions/Donations	\$19,140
Tax Revenue	\$169,911
Grant Income	\$56,541
Tree Sales	\$40,341
Sales & Services	\$26,969
Other Revenue	\$23,621

TOTAL REVENUE **\$ 336,523**

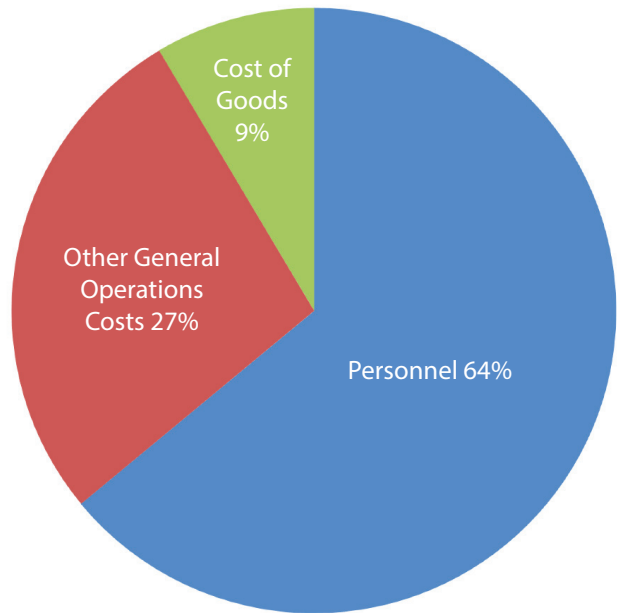
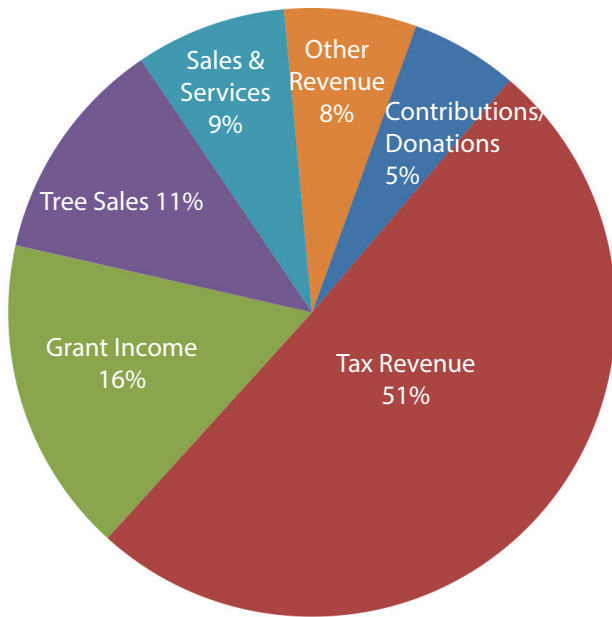
EXPENDITURES

General Operations	\$264,678
Personnel	\$185,184
Other G.O. costs	\$79,494
Cost of Goods	\$24,690

TOTAL EXPENDITURES **\$289,368**

**CONTRIBUTION
TO FUND BALANCE** **\$47,155**

**Data above is for period October 1, 2020 to September 30, 2021 and is unaudited.*



All the programs, workshops, and services, including walk-ins and phone calls, provided by the BCD this year directly engaged approximately 7,000+ local and visiting people!

Communications & Outreach *by Aimé Merizon*

This past year was another overall learning experience in many respects, but along with other organizations, we were also affected by the pandemic. Our programming consisted of at least 30 live, in-person events; and 17 virtual, webinar events (not counting all the zoom staff and board meetings!).

It's been really interesting hosting gatherings with the new platform of being at home and viewing participants and presenters on our computers. We've found that we definitely have a wider outreach with this format, and also it allows us more freedom to work with topics that can be conveyed through the internet.

However, it was truly a wonderful relief to start seeing and interacting with people in real time, even if masked! Thankfully most of our events are outside and that gave us more security for the volunteers and participants.

We held our planting workshop and spring and fall seedling sales—which were extremely successful—everyone seems to be interested in planting trees these days! We celebrated Earth Day and Coastal Clean Up Day with beach clean ups; sponsored three forestry workbees on the Frankfort School's property; enjoyed a week of little ones at our Nuts4Nature environmental day camp; and learned so much at fall hikes seeking out mushrooms, and other forest growth.

A new slant this year was a focusing inward and being personally reflective on our surroundings. This resulted in events such as a January, online nature journaling series; a spring nature journaling hike led by Judy Kelly; and in the summer we experienced a thoughtful, forest bathing workshop with Gloria Garrett.

For more information, please contact Aimé Merizon at 231.882.4391 x 11; aime@benziecd.org.

- WEBSITE PAGE VISITS: 9,087
- WEBSITE PAGE VIEWS: 25,315
- EBLAST OPENS: 10,524
- FACEBOOK PEOPLE REACHED: 25,662
- * FACEBOOK IMPRESSIONS: 30,525
- * INSTAGRAM FOLLOWERS + LIKES: 1,174
- NEWSPAPER CIRCULATION: 50,000 plus!



A forest bather meditates at Old Indian Trail.



Frankfort 5th grade students plant seedlings!



Nuts 4 Nature day camper, Ayden Wolpoff, shares his leaf monster art.

Natural Resource Conservation Service

by Scott Hughey

Since 1935 the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has been “helping people help the land.” For more than 80 years, we have helped people make investments in their operations and local communities, boost rural economies, increase the competitiveness of American agriculture, and improve the quality of our air, water, soil, and habitat.

As the USDA’s primary, private lands conservation agency we use objective, reliable science to assist our partners, and communities to make decisions about their natural resources. Through one-on-one personalized advice, we work with producers, landowners and communities to find the best solutions to meet their unique conservation and business goals. By doing so, we help ensure the health of our natural resources and the long-term viability of American agriculture.

This year the NRCS worked with Benzie County farmers and landowners to solve conservation resource concerns on their land. Following is a list of different conservation practices that NRCS helped to implement in Benzie County during 2021.

NRCS assisted with 30 applications for Farm Bill Conservation Programs, 8 of those for Benzie County. Total dollar value of those funded applications is \$349,618.00 with Benzie’s share being \$83,121.00 for 2021. These

dollars will be used by landowners to offset the cost of implementing conservation practices in Benzie County, and by providing them with NRCS technical staff and expertise. Four of the 8 successful applications that became contracts are first time customers/farmers with NRCS.

To learn more please check out www.nrcs.usda.gov or contact Scott Hughey or Tyler Dula at the NRCS field office in Bear Lake: 231.889.9666; scott.hughey@mi.usda.gov or tyler.dula@usda.gov



Highlights in 2021 for Benzie County:

- Cover Crops – 102 Acres
- No-Till – 55 Acres
- Pollinator Plantings – 2 Acres
- Prescribed Grazing – 81 Acres

Forestry Update *by Ellie Johnson*

Hello Benzie county residents! I am the newly hired District Forester servicing landowners in Benzie, Leelanau, and Grand Traverse counties with the Forestry Assistance Program (FAP) funded by the Michigan Department of Agriculture & Rural Development. I moved up to the area in July for a seasonal, resilient habitat technician position for Antrim Conservation District, and I’m so grateful for this opportunity to stay and continue to explore NW Michigan. Prior to this I was attending Clemson University in South Carolina where I graduated this past August with an MS in Forest Resources. I’m originally from Erie, Pennsylvania and I’m happy to be back in a more northern latitude (though I’m a little nervous to relearn how to drive in the snow)!

Currently, I am meeting Benzie landowners and getting to know the local ecology and culture. I’ve been impressed with the wonderful people and organizations who are very eco-conscious and knowledgeable on a wide variety of environmental topics.



A lot of my job is doing site visits and hosting educational workshops. If you have a question about your forests or if there is a forestry-oriented subject you are curious to learn more about, please reach out to me and

I’d be happy to assist! In undergrad I earned a BS in Environmental Biology and a BSe in Secondary Biology Education. To have a job that wears both hats is awesome, and to do so for such an engaged community is going to be really great. I look forward to learning alongside you and helping you manage your forests.

Here’s a little more background about myself: I love being outside, cooking with friends, playing board games and sports, and creating art. I’d be more than happy to have a cup of tea with you and discuss trees, the NBA, or books. Contact me at 231.256.9783 x 268; ellie.

Ellie & her orange tabby cat, Wes Anderson.



Faces of BCD...

