



# BENZIE

## CONSERVATION DISTRICT



# 2019 Annual Report

*Image: participants enjoy Benzie Long Lake water tour*

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



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*Outreach  
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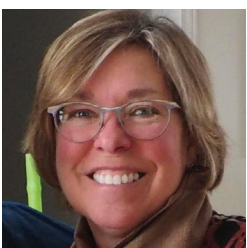
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Specialist*



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*Aquatic Invasive  
Species Coordinator*



**Jodi Monteith**  
*Aquatic Invasive  
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*District Forester*



**Scott Hughey**  
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**Katie Grzesiak**  
*Invasive Species  
Network Coordinator*



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*MAEAP  
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**Michelle Jacques**  
*Produce Safety  
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**Elyse Gagné**  
*District Intern*

**A Huge Thank You  
to Our Partners,  
Supporters &  
Volunteers!**



280 SOUTH BENZIE BOULEVARD  
POST OFFICE BOX 408  
BEULAH, MICHIGAN 49617  
231.882.4391  
[WWW.BENZIECD.ORG](http://WWW.BENZIECD.ORG)

# District News: *Our Common Bond*

In these divisive times, it's comforting to know that there is something the vast majority of us can agree on: a clean environment. Whether you're conservative or liberal, or somewhere in between, most of us can agree that a healthy and vibrant environment plays a key role in our overall well-being. For example, research shows that a walk in the woods has a calming effect on us because certain "feel good" hormones are naturally released when in the presence of nature, and trees in particular. Our local economy is also hugely dependent on the availability of clean water for swimming, fishing, sailing and beaching. And our diverse lands support a thriving agricultural community along with vast stretches of forest and recreational lands.

Here at the BCD, we're proud to be a part of preserving our incredible natural resources. And we're fortunate to be in a line of work that brings people of all backgrounds and ideas together for a common cause: promoting the health and well-being of our environment. In the following pages you'll discover a world of positive environmental activism accomplished by the BCD staff and our partners. These activities and projects wouldn't happen without you, the good folks who share our common bond. Thank you so much for your continued support.

All the best,



Tad Peacock, Executive Director

## *Garden Party* Nature Art Auction



*Special thanks to all  
our sponsors and art  
contributors for a very  
successful Garden Party  
fundraiser!*





# Invasive Species Network *by Katie Grzesiak*

2019 was a whirlwind of activity for the Northwest Michigan Invasive Species Network (ISN). Our projects for the fiscal year (October 2018-September 2019) have been successfully completed, with work in Benzie, Grand Traverse, Leelanau, and Manistee counties. Funding through the US Forest Service, US EPA (both grants from the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative), Gerstacker Foundation, Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians, and the Michigan Invasive Species Grant Program (through the Quality of Life departments MDNR, MDEQ, and MDARD) enabled ISN to accomplish a lot. Donations, cost-share funds, and providing fee-based services made even more projects possible.

Surveying for hemlock woolly adelgid (HWA) started in January and continued into early spring. This project is



*Audrey Menninga inspects Hemlocks*

part of a larger effort to stop the spread of HWA which has been discovered south of ISN's service area. The survey crew, Audrey Menninga and Andy Harmon, did an incredible job. Additionally, Audrey was hired on as ISN's fourth, full-time staff member as our Invasive Species Specialist; we are grateful to have her on board!

As in previous years, ISN hosted garlic mustard workbees in all four counties. We were also able to continue working with regional partners and the US Forest Service to place garlic mustard dumpsters in every county in ISN's service area. Thank you to the City of Frankfort, Lake Township (Benzie), Leelanau Conservancy, Manistee Conservation District, and Grand Traverse Conservation District for hosting those dumpsters!

Additional workbees continued throughout the summer, i.e., we partnered with the Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy to focus on baby's breath at Elberta Beach in Benzie County. The improving health of the beach and dune is evident with the appearance of new native plants growing, like native dunegrass, wormwood, and pitcher's thistle.

ISN's Go Beyond Beauty program to voluntarily remove invasive ornamental plants from trade had another successful year. ISN is excited to announce Old Mission Associates, LLC. as our first Gold Level Achievement participant. Eight nurseries and 14 landscapers continue to

keep their commitment to not sell or use high-priority invasive ornamentals.

ISN also helped remove the invasive ornamental Japanese barberry from many landscapes in our third year of the Trade-Up program. Participants removed barberry and brought them to ISN for disposal in exchange for a \$5 coupon to a participating Go Beyond Beauty professional. In all, over 150 Japanese barberry plants were removed from landscapes. (More than 650 plants have been removed since the program started!) Cheers to Grow Benzie, in Benzonia, for being our second Trade-up site this year!

Our crew worked with partners and private landowners to treat everything from the newly-discovered black swallow-wort in Kingsley to invasive knotweeds, invasive thistles, Phragmites, and more. We worked with partners to plant and protect native plants in areas that had been treated previously.

The fiscal year concluded with three very successful autumn olive workshops – one in Leelanau County at Veronica Valley Park and two in Manistee County at Orchard Beach State Park.

If you have questions, want to get involved, or wish to schedule a presentation to a school group, garden club, interest group, local government, or others, visit [www.HabitatMatters.org](http://www.HabitatMatters.org) or contact Katie Grzesiak at [kgrzesiak@gtcd.org](mailto:kgrzesiak@gtcd.org) or (231) 941-0960 x 29.

## ISN in 2018/2019:

- Surveyed over 6,000 acres of high-quality habitats for invasive species at over 400 sites
- Restored over 30 acres with native plants
- Treated over 1,200 acres of high-priority invasive species at over 300 sites
- Coordinated 10 workbees and 58 other events
  - ♦ Engaged nearly 60 volunteers for over 120 volunteer hours
- Contacted over 3,600 people in-person and over 400,000 using traditional & social media
  - ♦ Nearly 400 people contacted ISN for the first time to have their questions answered
- Responded to Early Detection reports:
  - ♦ Black swallow-wort populations treated in Kingsley
  - ♦ Hogweed population treated in Manistee
  - ♦ New species: Chinese yam confirmed in Grand Traverse County
  - ♦ Dozens of responses to mistaken reports handled over the phone/email



# Aquatic Invasive Species *by Jane Perrino*

The District's "Aquatic Invasive Species Pathways Program" has just wrapped its third field season. Our staff were busy throughout the year presenting to clubs and local governments, hosting field trips for Benzie area students, and collaborating on special events which promoted aquatic invasive species (AIS) awareness.

Boat washing activities continued for races such as the Butterfly National Championship Regatta held at the Crystal Lake Yacht Club, the "M22 Challenge" triathlon on Glen Lake, the "Crystal Lake Stand Up Paddle Challenge" and the "Tri Up North" triathlon on Betsie Lake. We also provided outreach and free boat decontamination to regional boaters at public launch sites. Overall, we washed 241 boats, spoke with 669 boaters and directly educated 2,359 individuals.

This past season, we increased our services through enrollment of five Benzie lakes in the statewide Cooperative Lakes Monitoring Program. Lakes selected for monitoring this year were: Betsie Lake, (Big) Platte Lake, Long Lake, Herendeene Lake, and Turtle Lake. With the main goal of mapping plant communities in each lake, we also gathered data on water temperature, dissolved oxygen, transparency, spring and fall phosphorus, and chlorophyll-a levels. A shoreline habitat analysis was also completed for each lake. Of note, we determined Eurasian watermilfoil has become established in Herendeene Lake, Almira Township. Curious about monitoring? See program contact below!

The aforementioned activities were made possible this year through the Benzie Conservation District millage, remaining Michigan Invasive Species Grant Program funds, local township contributions (Benzonia, Blaine, Crystal Lake, Lake, Homestead and Almira), a grant through the Benzie Sunrise Rotary Foundation Inc., and a new partnership with the Huron-Manistee National Forest.

For more about this program, booking our boat wash team, and AIS inquiries, please contact AIS Coordinator, Jane Perrino: jane@benziecd.org, or (231) 882-4391.



*We were pleased to host our 2nd annual snorkeling field trip for Benzie area high schoolers. Students got up-close and personal with the Platte River, and learned about aquatic invasive species in our waters.*

## AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES PATHWAYS PROGRAM

# 2019

### At-A-Glance

### CLEAN BOATS

At races, fishing and boating events, our team washed 241 boats

# 241

and educated many more boaters on 9 lakes, and 2 rivers

# 669

### MONITORING

# 5

Benzie lakes were monitored by our team this summer

# 7

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

We were joined in the field by new and return volunteers

# 41

Who gave their time to survey and educate

# 120 HRS

### EDUCATION

Our "Aquatic Invasive Species Pathways Program" staff participated in or hosted 37 special events this year, directly engaging 2,359 people and indirectly educating over 35,000 public through various forms of media.

# Forestry Update *by Kama Ross*

As forests through Benzie County are showing us their best colors, we reflect back on a very active year with the Forestry Assistance Program. Forest landowners are invited to request a site visit for technical assistance from Kama Ross, our District Forester, at no charge because of grant funding through the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Landowners most commonly have questions or concerns about the health of their trees. Beech Bark Disease and Oak wilt are the two most common concerns shared by many of us. The Lake Ann area experienced many new oak wilt infestations and we continue to caution landowners to learn about control precautions if they have oak on their property. Visit [www.michiganoakwilt.org](http://www.michiganoakwilt.org) for identification, control and treatment practices for Oak wilt. Beech Bark Disease continues to spread into our northern hardwoods and we are seeing a lot of scale and failing beech trees – an extremely hazardous situation that we recommend monitoring closely. Visit [www.michigan.gov/invasives/](http://www.michigan.gov/invasives/), and type in “Beech Bark Disease” in the search bar.

Many landowners also ask questions about when is the best time to have a sustainable harvest to keep their forest growing at its optimal rate, while still producing the products that they desire. There are so many variables to consider, so an on-site visit is the best place to start. Before signing a timber harvest contract with a logger or timber buyer, we highly recommend having a forester out to make sure the harvest is going to be good for the landowner and their woods.

A growing number of landowners have open areas and fallow fields that they would like to plant to trees and shrubs. District staff recommend planting native species that match the site and the planting goals. Having the opportunity to evaluate their site, talk about alternatives and make good decisions based on science has resulted in landowner’s enjoying greater planting success. Looking into our bi-annual seedling sales, and the spring and fall planting workshops is a good place to start for native plants and trees.

Many Benzie forest landowners continue to sign up for the Qualified Forest Program (QFP) which provides property tax relief in exchange for landowners sustainably harvesting trees. QFP helps owners who don’t claim their forested property as their principal residence, to keep the forest property in production. If you own 20 acres or more, give Kama a call to learn more.

## FY2018-2019 Benzie County

- 82 office initial contacts
- 49 landowner site visits covering 3,006 acres
- 143 landowner follow-up contacts
- 11 landowner referrals to consultant and industry foresters covering 2,028 acres
- 41 regional outreach educational events reaching 1,594 area landowners
- 31 regional media occurrences (newsprint, web, radio, tv)

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](mailto:kama.ross@macd.org).



*Planting Day at Ruby Ellen Farm was a great success for all ages and all trees!*



# Fiscal Year Finances 2018 - 2019

## REVENUE

Contributions/Donations	\$24,550
Tax Revenue	\$157,619
Grant Income	\$47,328
Tree Sales	\$17,443
Sales & Services	\$15,512
Other Revenue	\$2,916

**TOTAL REVENUE** **\$265,368**

## EXPENSES

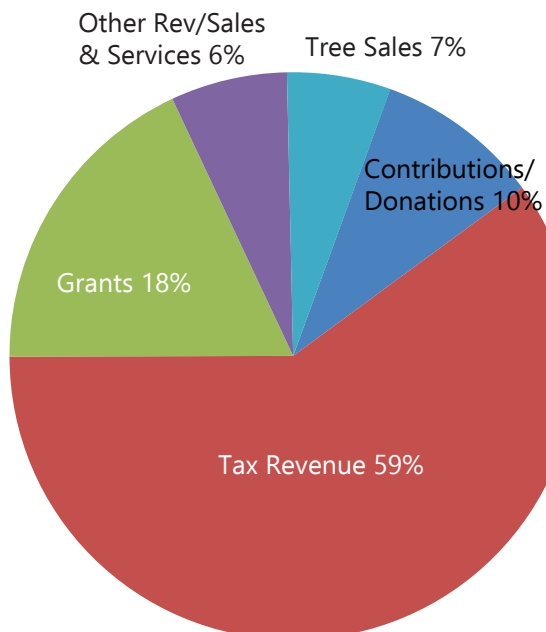
General Operations	\$226,293
Cost of Goods	\$8,243
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>\$234,536</b>

**NET ORDINARY INCOME** **\$30,832**

*\*Data above is for period October 1, 2018 to September 30, 2019 and is unaudited.*

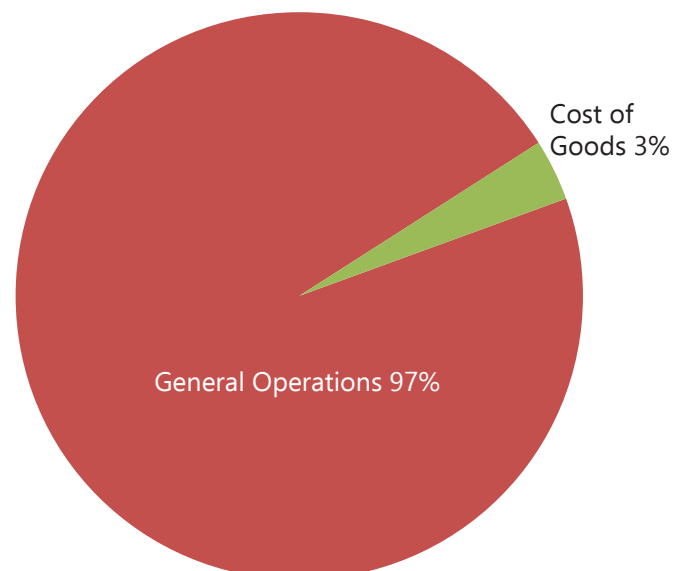
## REVENUE PERCENTAGES

Grants	18%
Donations	10%
Tree sales	7%
Other revenue/sales & services	6%
Tax revenue	59%



## 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 7,000+ local and visiting people!*

# Waterways *by John Ransom*

There is so much that unites us in Benzie County, but nothing more than our beautiful waterways. Our water draws us to the area, to work, live, and play in Benzie County. At the Conservation District we remain committed to bringing people together to protect our world class lakes, streams, and wetlands. Whether it's an organization that has been working in their watershed for decades, or someone who is just visiting for the first time, we are here to serve the watershed stewards of Benzie County.

In 2019 we worked with volunteers and partners to monitor water quality across the county in all three major watersheds. The BCD has been working with the Crystal Lake & Watershed Association to measure nutrients and water quality at most of the major tributaries to Crystal Lake. This will help us pinpoint potential problem areas within the watershed. We have also partnered with the village of Beulah to try to address the E. coli and nutrient issues at Beulah beach and Cold Creek on the east end of Crystal Lake. We continue to strengthen our partnership with the Platte Lake Improvement Association to try to answer a myriad of questions in the Platte Watershed. In total we have collected over 2,500 water quality data points across Benzie County.

However, fostering a stewardship ethic in Benzie remains our most valuable tool towards preserving and enhancing our natural resources. By providing people with the opportunity to explore a new lake, clean up a river, collect aquatic bugs, or spending time paddling down the Platte River with a group of 7th graders, we hope to encourage everyone to become a watershed steward.

For more information, contact John at 231.882.4391 x 13; [john@benziecd.org](mailto:john@benziecd.org).



*Benzie 7th graders head out after a brief stop at Kittendorf Landing during the Leave No Trace program on the Platte River canoe trip.*





# Education & Outreach *by Aimé Merizon*

It's so exciting to have social media options to help us reach more folks than ever these days! For us, it provides a direct and fast avenue to reach a lot of people, to stay in touch with those who travel in winter months, and to meet new participants or volunteers.

Some of the events we hosted and partnered on this past year include our annual river clean ups, beach clean ups, water tours, and various workshops and hikes. We also sponsor programs such as "Nature Discovery" (a nature center that brings wildlife to classrooms), which we hosted this year at Betsie Valley Elementary; Leave No Trace (our annual Platte River canoe trip for Benzie County 7th graders); and Nuts 4 Nature, an environmental day camp where we collaborate with Nature Explorers in Benzonia. A mainstay is our annual fall and spring seedling sales.

One of our new, art-themed events we put together this year was "Designs of Nature: Environmental Art Workshop"—this gave adults a creative, introspective afternoon in January. In July we hosted the Garden Party: Nature Art Auction; this event proved to be lots of fun, a great overall success, and brought in funds for youth educational programming.

## Natural Resource Conservation Service

Since 1935 the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has been "helping people help the land." Supporting America's working lands NRCS has a proud history of supporting America's farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners. For more than 80 years, we have helped people make investments in their operations and local communities to keep working lands working, 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 voluntarily 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 .

We are always looking to bring new ideas and informative events to our amazing community and work to help preserve and enhance Benzie's natural resources! Questions? Ideas? Contact Aimé at 231.882.4391 x 11; aime@benziecd.org.

- WEBSITE PAGE VISITS – 6,678
- WEBSITE PAGE VIEWS – 16,474
- PHONE CALLS – 564
- WALK-INS – 547
- EBLAST OPENS – 15,506
- FACEBOOK POST/PAGE REACH – 33,800
- NEWSPRINT CIRCULATION – 50,000 PLUS!



*Top: It took a team to pull out a tractor tire at beach clean up. Below: Record numbers at our Mushroom Workshop! Thank You!*



## *by Scott Hughey*

NRCS assisted with 14 applications for Farm Bill Conservation Programs, 4 of those for Benzie County. Total dollar value of those funded applications is \$211,970.00 with Benzie's share being \$115,369.00 for 2019. 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.

If you would like to learn more about NRCS and financial assistance through the Farm Bill, check out [www.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov) or contact the Benzie CD for more information. NRCS field staff meet with landowners and producers by appointment. To set up a time to meet and discuss your resource concerns and conservation goals, please contact the NRCS field office in Bear Lake at 231.889-9666 or by email: [scott.hughey@mi.usda.gov](mailto:scott.hughey@mi.usda.gov).

- COVER CROPS – 45 ACRES
- NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT – 155 ACRES
- INTEGRATED PEST MANAGEMENT – 139 ACRES
- INVASIVE SPECIES REMOVED – 94 ACRES
- ABANDONED ORCHARDS REMOVED – 30 ACRES



## MAEAP News *by Parker Ameal*

2019 has been a busy year for MAEAP (Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program). In the four county region of Antrim, Benzie, Leelanau, and Grand Traverse there were over 106 environmental risk assessments conducted. There were 31 new verifications and 28 reverifications across these four counties. Benzie County had 4 new verifications and 4 reverifications. We now have 267 MAEAP system verifications in the four-county region!

In the past year, MAEAP has been busy taking part in trainings, workshops, and conferences throughout the state as well as putting on informational events and collaborating with other natural resource and agriculture professionals in the region. We conducted 12 “phase-1” educational sessions throughout the year. Some of the more notable speaking engagements were at the: Northwest Michigan Orchard & Vineyard Show, Northern Michigan Small Farms Conference, Freshwater Summit, and the Tree

Fruit Management School. Additionally, this fall we hosted a “Forest, Wetland, and Habitat Field Day” at the GTCD that educated land-owners on forest and land management planning. We also participated in educational events for kids including: Nuts 4 Nature in Benzonia, the Leelanau Conservation District Field Day, and the Progressive Agriculture and Safety Day in Benzie County.

In September, the MAEAP technicians organized a Tractor Tire Recycling Day that was open to producers in our four counties to bring in used and unwanted tires to be recycled at no cost to them. Additionally, we have started a monthly, agriculture-related film series hosted at GTCD entitled “Farming for the Future: Regenerative Agriculture, Climate Resiliency, and Food Sovereignty.” In the coming year we are looking forward to continuing

our technical support for agricultural producers in MAEAP as well as expanding our outreach to community members on agriculture related issues.



*Mike Henschell of Benzie County is verified!*

## Produce Safety Program *by Michelle Jakokes*

The Michigan On-Farm Produce Safety Program for Northwest Michigan provides assistance to fresh produce growers to be compliant with the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) Produce Safety Rule or are working to optimize produce safety practices and procedures on their farm.

The FSMA Produce Safety Rule regulatory inspections started in Michigan this summer. Inspections for this year are focusing on “large farms” as defined by the rule. Technicians worked hard to spread the word of assistance in 2019, determined to reach growers to review practices and prepare for any questions they may have prior to inspections. It is important to note that the Michigan On-Farm Produce Safety Program serves not only covered growers, but growers of all sizes to reach high produce safety standards on the farm across the board.

The program in northwest Michigan reached over 260 growers in Manistee, Benzie, Grand Traverse, Leelanau and Antrim counties with information and resources regarding Produce Safety. Benzie County had 3 farms that underwent an assessment, and/or made changes to their processes and procedures on the farm. An educational Produce Safety Workshop was held in Benzie County

at Grow Benzie. In the five-county region 12 farms participated in a Produce Safety Risk Assessment, and two were awarded certificates from the state for completing all necessary requirements of the assessment and developing Produce Safety Plans. Additionally, two farms completed an On-Farm Readiness Review.

The 2019 season included 33 farms in the region that inquired about improving produce safety practices in their operation, and multiple visits to discuss produce safety on the farm. Cheers to continued proactive approaches towards safe food in Benzie County and the northwest growing region. A special thanks to all farms that provide fresh, nutritious, local produce that is safe for the eating!

To stay up-to-date with Produce Safety in the area visit [www.manisteedc2.org/produce-safety](http://www.manisteedc2.org/produce-safety) or contact Michelle Jakokes, Produce Safety Technician at [michelle.jakokes@macd.org](mailto:michelle.jakokes@macd.org); 231)889-9666.





BENZIE CONSERVATION DISTRICT

74<sup>th</sup>

# Annual Meeting

Thurs, November 21st

6:30 to 8:00 pm @ Mills Community House

## **“American Martens & Fishers in Michigan”**



*guest presenter* **Linda Thomasma**  
**wildlife biologist**



Linda received a B.S. in Biology from Grand Valley State University. She went on to earn a M.S. and Ph.D. from Michigan Technological University where she studied the American marten and fisher in the Upper Peninsula. Linda did a post-doc in the School of Forestry at SUNY Syracuse and then was a Research Wildlife Biologist for the US Forest Service, Northern Research Station in West Virginia. Returning to Michigan, she accepted a position at GVSU and taught in the Natural Resources Management Program. After teaching, Linda worked for a private timber company in Northern California on the 92,000 acre Collins Almanor Forest as their only wildlife biologist. Again she and her husband returned to Michigan and she worked as a consultant for public and private land owners. Linda has had the great good fortune to work in a variety of ecosystems with a diversity of wildlife species. Her career has spanned both the public and private sectors as a researcher, educator, and land manager.

***Enjoy tasty hors d'oeuvres catered by Still Grinning Kitchens!***

WWW.BENZIECD.ORG



*We're proud of our Benzie community that  
helps protect & sustain our natural resources.  
Thank you!*



[www.benziecd.org](http://www.benziecd.org)