

ANNUAL REPORT 2022

Benzie Conservation District

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

John Ransom and Saige Phelps monitoring Upper Woodcock Lake

Board of Directors



Greg Kindig
Chair



Roberta Dow
Vice Chair



Bill Henning
Treasurer



Ron Heverly
Director



Remington Rice
Director

Staff



Tad Peacock
Executive Director



Jessica Barnard
*Communications &
Administrative
Coordinator*



John Ransom
*Conservation
Specialist*



Jane Perrino
*Development
Coordinator*



Jodi Monteith
*Conservation
Technician*



Ellie Johnson
District Forester



Scott Hughey
*NRCS District
Conservationist*



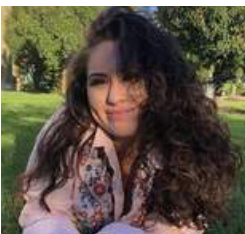
Audrey Menninga
*Invasive Species
Network Coordinator*



Jamie Robinson
AIS Technician



Emily Cook
AISPP Coordinator



Aiyana Mennega
AIS Technician



Emma Carley
AIS Technician



Saige Phelps
Summer Intern



280 SOUTH BENZIE BLVD
POST OFFICE BOX 408
BEULAH, MICHIGAN 49617
231.882.4391
WWW.BENZIECD.ORG

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



A Fond Farewell

I'm a lucky man. It's been nearly 15 years since my tenure started here at the Benzie Conservation District and they've been 15 of the most rewarding years of my life! As fate would have it, I happened to be in the right place at the right time in April of 2008, and I was launched into a journey that's been invigorating, challenging, humbling, sometimes desperate (in the early years) and overwhelmingly gratifying.

One of the very best things about working here has been the staff. John Ransom, Jane Perrino, and Emily Cook (on sabbatical) are known statewide for their work on sampling and data management and for work in addressing the ominous specter of aquatic invasive species. Jodi Monteith and her crew of field techs have expertly surveyed the shorelines of dozens of local lakes, determining which plants are native and which are not. Then there's the ancillary staff who aren't housed here but who cover our county—Scott Hughey, district conservationist with the NRCS, Ellie Johnson, our district forester, Adam Brown, a field tech who works with area growers, and Breanna Hannula, the Produce Safety Technician covering our area. The work they do helps us understand what's going on and what, if anything, needs to be done about it. They truly are heroes. And our newest staff member, Jessica Barnard, is soaking up knowledge as fast as it comes her way. Jessica is our new Communication/Administrative

Coordinator and her organizational skills are second to none. For a growing organization, that's imperative.

As wonderful as it's been to watch the district grow into a "working office," the truly best thing about the last 15 years for me are the associations and friendships I've had the honor of being a part of. To be involved with folks who understand and care about Benzie's natural world, who are curious and dedicated, who commit their lives to this work so that we can all prosper, has been a gift to me. It's not the industrialist who will save the world—it's the environmental community.

It's a cliché but it's sometimes said that if you love what you do, you never work a day in your life. That's me. Even so, I'll be retiring at the end of the year and I want to thank everyone who ever came in, called, volunteered, worked with us, voted for our millage, donated to our cause or just chatted with us about your successes or concerns. It's been the best journey I could have ever imagined—and I thank you from the bottom of my heart.

All the Best,

Tad Peacock, Executive Director



Independence Day Parade, 2018



BCD Art Auction, 2019



Tad and Rebel, his rescued phoebe

On Development *by Jane Perrino*

As a result of strategic planning and annual visioning meetings, the District launched a new Development program this past spring. While the BCD receives baseline operations funding through a millage, many services offered by our organization are contingent upon grants, donations and partnerships. Conveniently, staff member Jane Perrino was equipped with grant management and fundraising skills through her work coordinating the BCD's Aquatic Invasive Species Pathways Program for five years, and she had a natural passion for communicating with others about our activities.

This Development program's intention is to sustain and grow the BCD's resources by building relationships with those who understand and care about the organization's relevance to the community. We strive to create a shared vision and seek to clearly articulate the BCD mission, *"To preserve and enhance the natural resources of Benzie County."* The BCD is greatly appreciative of the efforts by the "Friends of the BCD" group in getting out the word on our 2022 millage vote.



"The Gift" - a milkweed seed case in fall

Much of the past six months has focused on putting infrastructure in place to better support these efforts. We are excited to share we've begun work on establishment of an Endowment Fund and look forward to sharing more on this very soon. Stay tuned for events, publications and new opportunities to come alongside the BCD as we steward Benzie's beautiful resources. For more information, contact Jane Perrino, Development Coordinator, at: Jane@benziecd.org or 231-882-4391.

Lake Monitoring Report *by Jodi Monteith*

Michigan's unique location provides its citizens with a richness of freshwater resources including over 11,000 inland lakes. Benzie County has over 100 of these lakes! In addition to being a valuable ecological resource, lakes provide aesthetic and recreational value for the people of Michigan and its visitors.

As more and more people use the lakes and surrounding watersheds, the potential for pollution, shoreline development, and the spread of aquatic invasive species increases dramatically. The continuing stress on the lakes and watersheds over time can lead to water quality and recreational impacts.

Reliable information of water quality data, levels of use, and shoreline development are essential for determining the health of a lake and for developing a management plan to protect the lake. As the users and beneficiaries of Michigan's lake resources, citizens must take an active role in obtaining this information and managing their lakes.

Since 1974, Michigan has maintained a volunteer lake monitoring program, known as the Cooperative

BCD Fieldwork Fun Facts 2022

Surveyed 8.81 miles of shoreline

Identified 30 different aquatic plant species, including 2 invasive

Spent 41 days in the field (on the lake)

Engaged 92.5 volunteer hours

Presented in the Leave No Trace, CLMP Walkabout, and Sleeping Bear Sand Dunes Jr. Angler education programs

Removed 41 lbs of trash from Elberta Beach for the annual Adopt a Beach Program

Lakes Monitoring Program (CLMP), making it the second oldest program of its kind in the nation. This program provides a baseline of information by documenting trends in water quality for individual lakes.

As a participant of the statewide MiCORPS and CLMP programs, the Benzie Conservation District continues the “self-help” legacy by providing lakeshore property owners an opportunity to learn and participate in lake monitoring. Currently the BCD and CLMP monitor for Secchi disc transparency,

total phosphorus, chlorophyll a, dissolved oxygen/temperature, shoreline survey, and native and invasive aquatic plant survey.

This summer the BCD staff monitored 5 of Benzie County’s inland lakes including Upper and Lower Woodcock, Lower Herring, Loon, and Lake View. The water quality in all five lakes was generally very high, with 3 out of 5 having no invasive aquatic plants. Full results on each lake will be available this winter on the MiCORPS website: data.micorps.net/view/lake/

Aquatic Invasive Species *by Jane Perrino*

Six seasons in the books! The Aquatic Invasive Species Pathways Program (AISPP) continued its work educating boaters and public on the prevention of aquatic invasive species (AIS) spread, this year across *four* counties. This arm of the BCD is active in Benzie, Grand Traverse, Leelanau and Manistee counties. The enthusiastic AISPP team hosted or partnered on over 40 events on 22 different water bodies. Events included Frankfort’s “Take A Kid Fishing Day,” local fairs, races, and educational launch site boat washing and directly engaged 2,727 boaters and public. AIS introductions continue to pose a threat to our beautiful northern waters and our team witnessed boats being launched from more than 15 different states. Fortunately, overall response to our boat washing services continues to be positive. Best practices for clean boating will make an impact far beyond our contacts and we see an increase in *permanent* boat washing resources in the region as lake associations and townships make new strides together.

Other program activities included AIS awareness sign improvements and installations, presentations, and launch site vegetation surveys.

We’re grateful for the collaboration of 45 volunteers! Their passion for their home lakes enriched the AISPP’s outreach tremendously. This program also receives funding through a multi-year Michigan Invasive Species Grant Program award, a Great Lakes Commission “Great Lakes Landing Blitz” initiative grant, Grand Traverse Band of Chippewa and Ottawa Indians 2 % grant, contributions from Benzie Townships (Almira, Benzonia, Blaine, Crystal Lake, Homestead and Lake) as well as the generosity of donors. Thank you!

We look forward to working for our beautiful waters in 2023! For more information or questions, contact us at Benziecd@benziecd.org or 231-882-4391.



Waterways *by John Ransom*

This year marks my 7th year as the Conservation Specialist at the Benzie Conservation District. As much as things change, much remains the same. In my role at the BCD I strive to stay on top of the latest science and threats to our waters, while providing a steady presence as local leader in water quality protection. I have continued to provide water monitoring assistance to partners across all three major watersheds in Benzie County. In addition to our regular monitoring, I have been helping develop a state-of-the-art watershed database with Dr. Ray Canale for the Platte Lake Improvement Association. In the Crystal Lake Watershed we finished a second year of bacteria source tracking in the Cold Creek watershed as we move into the implementation phase of the Beulah storm water renovations.

2022 marks the 10th year of our Volunteer Stream Monitoring Program. We are grateful for our incredible volunteers who have helped make that program such

a success over the last decade. Speaking of volunteers, we hosted over 50 volunteers for our river cleanups this year and cleared 250 pounds of trash out of the Platte and Betsie Rivers and 39 tires out of Betsie Bay.

Finally, this year I joined Jodi Monteith and Summer Intern Saige Phelps in monitoring 5 lakes in Benzie County in Partnership with the US Forest Service. The enthusiasm and wonder that Jodi and Saige brought to their work every day was the true joy of my summer.

From our amazing partners and volunteers, to my colleagues who share a common passion, I am filled with gratitude to be able to work with many amazing people to serve Benzie County. 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.



Water quality project map in Benzie County, 2022. Image A: Jodi Monteith and Saige Phelps monitoring plants on Upper Woodcock Lake. Image B: tire removal at Betsie Bay. Image C: Betsie River Volunteer Stream Monitoring crew, fall 2022.

Fiscal Year 2022 Finances*

Revenue

Contributions/Donations	\$10,668
Tax Revenue	\$174,153
Grant Income	\$110,296
Tree Sales	\$38,370
Sales & Services	\$23,660
Other Revenue	\$60,608

Total Revenue **\$417,755**

Expenditures

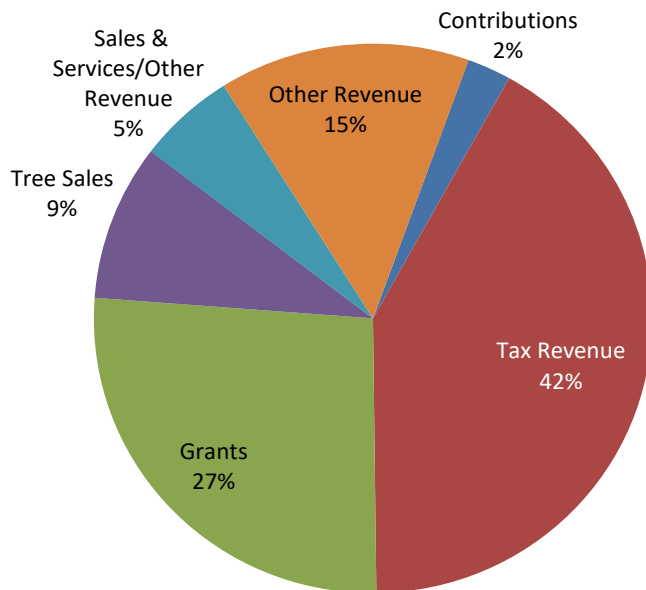
General Operations	\$365,013
Personnel	\$236,666
Other G.O. Costs	\$128,347
Cost of Goods	\$28,987

Total Expenditures **\$394,000**

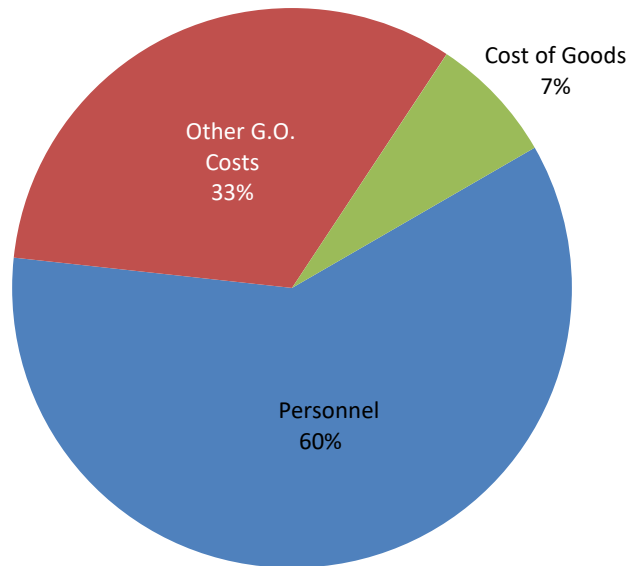
Contribution to Fund Balance **\$23,755**

**Data above is for period October 1, 2021 to September 30, 2022 and is unaudited.*

Revenue Percentages



Expenses Percentages



Volunteers participating in the 2022 Adopt a Beach program with the BCD at Elberta Beach

Communications *by Jessica Barnard*

Hi Benzie County! My name is Jessica (she/her), and I'm the Benzie Conservation District's newest member, the communications and administrative coordinator. I graduated from Grand Valley State University this past April with a Bachelor of Arts in writing and a minor in anthropology. Grand Valley taught me a huge array of communication techniques, from storytelling, to article planning, to visual design, to animation and beyond. In college, I led a professional development group for student writers and was an editorial board member for my university's history journal. I love working with words and people to be the intermediary between an idea and a goal.

Originally from a small agricultural town ninety miles south, I grew up around orchards and fields, and I would travel to Benzie County to visit family for a while in the summers. Among the gorgeous waterways, unique shops, and lush forests, what stood out to me the most was the county's deeply ingrained commitment to preserving its natural environment. Here, educational and volunteer programs are not only readily available, but they're also easily accessible. In many places, that's a difficult standard to reach, but Benzie County's efforts are consistent and inspirational.

In college, I spent time studying climate change and the environment on a globalized scale, but I felt a pull to narrow in and use my writing and anthropology skills for the protection of nature and natural resources. I was thrilled to learn about the Benzie Conservation District's rich history of environmental enhancement and preservation, and when I got the job, I rushed up north just in time for the peak of fall color season. It's been lovely so far living in Benzie County and I'm so excited to get more involved with the community!

It's exciting to be part of an organization that's so warmly supported by the community. To the right, you can view statistics on the BCD's digital engagement from the past year. I look forward to bringing you BCD updates through our social media channels (on Facebook and Instagram @benziecd), and our website, www.benziecd.org, where you can register for our e-newsletter and special events. I'm particularly excited for District Readers, our ever-expanding environmental book club.

For any questions about our programs and events, feel free to contact me at jessica@benziecd.org.



Jessica at the BCD front desk

Digital Engagement (Jan. - Nov. 2022)

E-blast opens, including AIS communications:	15,862
Website views:	25,623
Website unique visits:	10,791
Facebook page reaches:	9,195
Facebook page visits:	1,124
Instagram reaches:	878
Instagram profile visits:	511

Connect with us!

Website: www.benziecd.org

Social media: @benziecd

NRCS Update *by Tyler Dula*

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, 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 during 2022. NRCS assisted with 46 applications for Farm Bill Conservation Programs, 15 of those for Benzie County. Total dollar value of those funded applications is \$263,988 with Benzie’s share being \$61,036.81 for 2022. 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. 8 of the 10 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



Top and bottom: Heavy Use Area Protection and Waste Storage Facility at Misty Acres Farm

Benzie Conservation District Annual Meeting 2022

Who: All are welcome!

When: Wednesday, November 16
6:30 P.M. to 8:00 P.M.

Where: Mills Community House
891 Michigan Ave
Benzonia, MI 49616

We’re thrilled to feature guest speaker Jim Olson, Founder and Sr. Legal Advisor of For Love of Water. He will address how a watershed framework, based on scientific data and knowledge and legal stewardship principles, can help us solve the systemic threats to water, environment, and life.

Invasive Species Network *By Audrey Menninga*

The Northwest Michigan Invasive Species Network's (ISN) 2022 season has been a year of learning! Due to significant staff turnover throughout the 2021 year, ISN entered the 2022 fiscal year without a Coordinator! However, ISN persevered. You may remember that Audrey Menninga took over the Coordinator position. Shelly Stusick remained strong in her position as *Go Beyond Beauty (GBB)* Specialist and we also welcomed new staff. In April we were overjoyed to have Habitat Management Specialist Murielle Garbarino join us. She jumped immediately into ISN, helping hire seasonal staff, contacting landowners, and arranging for treatments! ISN was also able to continue with some of our most popular programs! That includes:

- Garlic mustard dumpsters in **FIVE** places! We were overjoyed to welcome Village of Empire to our host sites this year. With hard work from volunteers, we were able to collect 93 bags of garlic mustard, which is about 30 acres of land protected.
- Japanese barberry trade-up days included another milestone for *GBB* program as we were able to offer **THREE** trade-up locations. *GBB* helped safely dispose of 374 barberry plants.
- Our treatment crew (Tanner, crew lead, and crew members Kallie and Cecelia) were able to get our priority invasive species treatments done! So, so many thanks to them for all their hard work, no matter the weather conditions.
- ISN conducted our two autumn olive workshops, with one in Manistee County and one—for the first time!—in Benzie County. We had amazing turnout! Forty people showed up in Benzie County alone to learn how manage and control autumn olive.
- *Go Beyond Beauty* began state-wide expansion! Our first statewide hub opened through the Friends of the St. Clair River. They've been ecstatic to join us, and we couldn't be happier to have them. Keep an ear out for further expansions.

To close out ISN's 2022 accomplishments, we're excited to announce ISN's next move: we are currently exploring the feasibility of becoming a non-profit organization. We're looking to better serve all four of our counties by establishing ourselves as a separate organization.

This winter we'll be resuming extensive hemlock woolly adelgid (HWA) surveys. So far, this invasive pest hasn't become established in our service area, though we had a close call in Benzie County in 2021. If you live within ten miles of the Lake Michigan shoreline and have five acres of property (or combine with your neighbors for a survey) please contact Murielle. Special considerations will be made for properties that have bought hemlock stock.

Stay tuned as we put our heads together this winter to plan events. As always, we appreciate our community's support for us. If you have any questions or concerns, never hesitate to reach out to us. You can also keep up-to-date about ISN and invasive species news and information by following us on Facebook (Northwest Michigan Invasive Species Network) or our Instagram ([invasivespeciesnetwork](https://www.instagram.com/invasivespeciesnetwork)).



ISN Team left to right: Go Beyond Beauty Specialist Shelly Stusick, ISN Coordinator Audrey Menninga, Habitat Management Specialist Murielle Garbarino.

Audrey Menninga, ISN Coordinator: amenninga@gtcd.org, 231-299-0786

Shelly Stusick, GBB Specialist: ssusick@gtcd.org, 231-299-0805

Murielle Garbarino, Habitat Management Specialist: mgarbarino@gtcd.org, 231-941-0960 x29

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.

Forestry Update *by Ellie Johnson*

My first year as District Forester for Leelanau, Grand Traverse, and Benzie counties was full of collaboration and personal growth. I made connections with so many landowners, natural resource professionals, academics, and volunteers who are all equal parts motivated and curious on becoming better stewards for our region's forests. This year, I conducted 219 site visits for private forestowners, visiting 5,691 acres of your woodlands to discuss silvicultural practices, forest health management, native plant landscaping, climate change resiliency, construction damage mitigation, invasive pest control, wildlife habitat, and numerous other topics. Fifty-one of those site visits were to Benzie residents, where I walked with them through their 1,130 acres and assisted them on management projects with 27 referrals to both private and public sector professionals.

I reached over 600 interested patrons at 25 educational events put on in association with numerous local organizations. This past winter and spring, I connected with almost 200 folks through a Winter Webinar series and a couple seedling workshops put on in partnership with all three of my conservation districts. I was part of packing and delivering trees at this year's seedling sales, had a few younger folks shadow me on site visits to learn about what I do, hosted guided hikes with entities like American Bird Conservancy and Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy, and gave talks to public groups on limiting disease spread and damage when conducting tree work. I wrote an "At Your Service" article for the fall edition of *Michigan Forests*, and I have been reaching a wider audience each week with my #ForesterFriday posts on Leelanau Conservation District's social media platforms.

This next year my hope is to continue expanding my network and being a segue for private landowners to access the information and professionals they need to execute their forest management goals. I have got another Winter Webinar series of guest speakers in the works, and I am helping to expand Benzie's District Readers to my entire service area. I have been asked to serve on the board for both the Michigan chapter of Society of American Foresters and Salix Community Forestry Collective. I am working to revamp the Assisted Tree Range Expansion Project (ATREP) website, and to team up with other like-minded individuals in environmental organizations across the region. If you are looking for technical assistance in managing

your forests, have ideas for environmental education programming you would like to share, or if you know of local professionals I should be connecting with, please do not hesitate in giving me a call (231-866-0103) or email ellie.johnson@macd.org. Thank you for welcoming me into your community and entrusting me to assist you in caring for your woodlands.



A Wetland Botanizing Hike for local natural resource professionals to network and learn some plant ID



Oak wilt workshop for those stationed across the state who work with the Forestry Assistance Program

HAPPY RETIREMENT TAD!

Thank you for all you've done
as the Benzie Conservation
District's Executive Director



Tad has put in incredible work to preserve not only the county's natural resources, but also the Conservation District itself. The BCD thrives today thanks to his championship of the first ever millage passed to fund a conservation district—a legacy that has rippled outward and inspired other districts to do the same. As a true community figure, he also arranged the Watershed Coalition, bringing together passionate individuals to collaborate on watershed protection efforts. He's made the BCD such a rewarding organization to work for, and we're so grateful to have worked with him!

—BCD Staff

It has been my pleasure to work with Tad as the treasurer for the BCD for the past 11 years. In that time, the office has grown immensely in no small part due to Tad's leadership. Where once we struggled to keep the lights on, we are now a thriving office working throughout the county to protect our natural resources. As Tad "rides off into the sunset" (pun intended), I wish him all the best in this next phase of his life.

—Bill Henning

Tad always brings enthusiasm and kindness to the room. When I joined, he was one of the first people to congratulate me and he made me feel welcomed. I appreciated his warmth.

—Remington Rice

Tad was usually quite accessible. I often stopped into the office, unannounced, to chat about issues that were important to the District's mission (millage, water sampling, grant applications, etc.) or only meaningful to us (snowshoeing, biking, building at-home disc-golf courses). Of course, if he was busy and I really needed to see him there was one sure way: Sit next door at L'Chayim and read the newspaper. Before long, guaranteed, Tad would be coming in to refill that endless cup of coffee. Actually, we all owe Tad a debt of gratitude. He was the one who made the leap of faith that the community cared about the environment and would vote to tax themselves to support the Conservation District. Ten years and three election victories later, he was obviously right about that.

—Ed Hoogterp