



## Board Report: December 2025

### Executive Summary:

This December, the CAKE team is already looking ahead to the next summer field season. We began eyeing out treatment locations and identifying any necessary permits and licensing required for invasive species removal. CAKE staff also packed and moved all CAKE office supplies and supported ACD with packing and moving materials in the main lobby, print/supply room, and storage office. Additionally, CAKE staff shoveled away the snow pile from the front of the new shed so it could be moved.

Individual CAKE staff members co-hosted a hemlock woolly adelgid (HWA) training with the DNR, a winter seed sowing workshop with the Grass River Natural Area, and spoke on tool lending libraries at the Michigan Association of Conservation Districts Conference.

### Project Updates:

Project	Last Month (November)	This Month (December)	Next Month (January)
<b>Hemlock Woolly Adelgid</b>	- Permit Reporting	- Pesticide Credit Renewal - UP Survey Training	- Continue Delineations and surveys
<b>Coastal-Riparian Restoration</b>	- Permit Reporting	- Pesticide Credit Renewal	- Site Planning
<b>Other</b>	- Make 2026 Workplan - Organize Drive	- Grant Reimbursement catch up	- Grant Reimbursement catch up
<b>Events</b>	- Garlic Mustard Papermaking Workshop!	- Speaking at MACD Conference - Seed sowing workshop (GRNA)	- Seed sowing Workshop (CCD) - Annual Meeting


## Financial Overview:

CAKE December Expenses	
Description	Expense
Wages	\$9,611.34
Fringe	\$4,498.72
Equipment Total	\$75.22
Training/Permits	\$373.00
Indirect	\$1,179.37
Contractual Total	\$0.00
Travel	\$0.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$15,737.65</b>

All Current CAKE Grants			
Description	Total Budget	Total Expenses	Total Remaining
Wages Total	\$281,083.15	\$159,265.61	\$121,817.54
Fringe Total	\$72,422.85	\$52,432.04	\$19,990.81
Equipment Total	\$20,510.00	\$7,937.40	\$12,572.60
Training/Permits	\$1,880.00	\$373.00	\$1,507.00
Indirect	\$40,497.00	\$22,626.65	\$17,870.35
Contractual Total	\$161,451.00	\$101,549.71	\$59,901.29
Travel	\$29,116.00	\$6,234.70	\$22,881.30
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$606,960.00</b>	<b>\$350,419.11</b>	<b>\$256,540.89</b>

### \*Notice:

We have let expire a memorandum of agreement with the Grand Traverse Bay Bands of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians (GTBB) which had granted CAKE CISMA \$80,000 to be used towards aquatic invasive species outreach and education - and toward treatment of herbaceous or woody invasive species. The terms of the agreement were arranged by a former coordinator and ACD executive director and were meant to begin October 1st, 2023 and end December 31st, 2025, but due to turnover in the coordinator position, the agreement was not initiated until June 11th, 2024. At the time of the signing, we had requested that the agreement be extended a year due to the delay and our contact at GTBB suggested we make the request near the end of the agreement term if needed.



During the period of back to back CAKE coordinator turnover, CAKE funds were not tracked and the amount of funding CAKE had was uncertain. In response to this uncertainty more grants were acquired to ensure funding of the program. Once fund tracking was reestablished, the CAKE program found that they had an excess of grant dollars and deliverables to achieve. Several other grants had already had extensions and were approaching the end of their term and were prioritized.

As the end of the term for the GTBB agreement grew near, our contact reached out to us and informed us that in order to get the agreement extended, we would have to go back to Tribal Council for approval and that since no work had been done under the grant, it would be unlikely to be extended. She advised that going before Tribal Council on the matter could hinder us from receiving future funding and recommended we allow the MOA to expire and explore future funding opportunities.

You may have noticed that despite the expiration of this agreement, CISMA available funds have not dropped, but actually risen slightly. That is due to the addition of a GLRI grant applied for in 2023, but only recently awarded in the amount of \$100,000.

### **Community Outreach:**

CAKE was able to sneak in our first seed sowing event of the winter. Event attendees learned the importance of native plants and tips on how to design their own native gardens from our guest speaker and landscape architect Gary Buczkowski. Attendees were also able to start their own native plant plugs from seed and make some for the Grass River Natural Area's future native garden as well!

As the CISMA with the North-most infestation of hemlock woolly adelgid (HWA), the DNR asked us to co-host an HWA survey training for several upper peninsula CISMA's and Conservation Districts. There we were able to add insight to what these northern organizations might expect in the coming years. In addition, one of our CISMA Coordinators, Kathrine, also attended and spoke at the 2025 MACD conference. At her breakout session, she informed other conservation districts across the state how to effectively start and run a tool lending program.

### **Map of the Month**

In lieu of a December map I have copied the agenda for the Michigan Invasive Species Coalition (MISC) Annual meeting which all CISMA coordinators in the state attend. Feel free to join the conference virtually if any of the topics/speakers seem interesting to you.

## Michigan Invasive Species Coalition

Annual Meeting Agenda: February 18-19, 2026

Treetops Resort, 3962 Wilkinson Rd, Gaylord, MI 49735

**February 18th, 2026** (Times are in eastern daylight time) \*Virtual Presentations

### Virtual Day 1: ([Join the meeting now](#))

10:00 AM EST Kickoff: Welcome/Icebreaker	Amanda Ruffini (LSCCISMA)
10:15 AM CISMA Introductions ("What are 3 things your CISMA is prioritizing for 2026?")	Christina Baugher (DNR)
11:00 AM State of Michigan Updates	
● Aquatic Invasive Species	Kevin Walters (EGLE)
● Terrestrial Invasive Species	Katie Grzesiak (DNR) Susie Iott (MDARD)
● MISGP Updates	Kelsey Dietz (DNR)
● State Parks	Emily Leslie (DNR)
● Additional Updates	Mike Hindy (DNR) Vicki Sawicki (DNR)
12:00 PM LUNCH (Provided) - and Bingo!	
1:00 PM Federal Updates	Justin Bournoville (USFS)
1:20 PM Supporting Partner Updates	
● EFB-3 Updates	Tom Alwin (EGLE)
● MISIN Updates	Claire Peterson (MISIN)
● The Stewardship Network Updates	Kim Steinberger (TNC)
● UP Updates	Nick Cassel (UPRCO)
● MNFI Updates	Rachel Hackett (MNFI)
2:10 PM T/E Species Compliance	Jen Kleitch (DNR)
2:30 PM Creating Awareness with Legislators	Joanne Foreman (DNR)
2:50 PM MDARD Pesticides	Kyle Williams (MDARD)
3:10 PM Break - CISMA Show & Tell Tables and Bingo!	
3:30 PM EGLE ANC Permits	Ryan Crouch (EGLE)
3:50 PM State Land Use Permits	Shelby Bauer (HHISN) Ryan Wheeler (DNR)
4:10 PM Invasive Worms	Brent Crain (MSUE) Ryan Wheeler (DNR)
4:35 PM Lesser celandine Update	Stephanie Day (M-M CISMA)
4:55 PM Closing Remarks - and Bingo!	
5:00 PM Adjourn	

CAKE CISMA December 2025 Board Report

**February 19th, 2026** (Times are in eastern daylight time) \*Virtual Presentations  
**Virtual Day 2: ([Join the meeting now](#))**

8:30 AM EST Meeting Kickoff: Welcome	Amber Hubbard (HCISN)
8:35 AM MISC Committee Updates	Amanda Ruffini (LSCCISMA)
• Co-chair Introduction	
8:40 AM Using GIS for Fieldwork	Nick Theisen (Huron Pines)
9:00 AM Community Foundation Funding	Patrick Heraghty (CFNEM)
9:20 AM EFB and Phragmites Updates	Nichole Angell (GLC)* Taaja Tucker-Silva (GLC)*
9:40 AM CISMA Governance Project Updates	Madi Carr (MSU)
10:00 AM Break - Poster Activity	
10:30 AM Cost Share Programs & For Hire Work	Lindsay Peterson (WRISC) Zach Peklo (NC CISMA) Amber Hubbard (HCISN) Sara Rahn
11:10 AM Managing Multiple Strike Teams	Murielle Garbarino (WMCISMA)
11:30 AM How to Press Plants	Rachel Hackett (MNFI)
11:50 AM Review Posters Group Discussion	Sara Rahn (BCK CISMA)
12:20 PM Closing Remarks	Amanda Ruffini (LSCCISMA)
12:30 PM Adjourn/Lunch (Provided)	



## ACD FORESTRY REPORT

December 16<sup>th</sup>, 2025 - January 15<sup>th</sup>, 2026

### **ACD Assistance**

Attended building committee meeting,

Attended board meeting.

Packed forestry office materials and moved them to my house for now. I have been sorting filing and throwing away outdated documents and correspondence. I have achieved old landowner files and educational materials and are in storage locker for now.

I have retained all information regarding county land management. I am in the process of organizing and updating these files. Will eventually transfer them to the county.

Used a few Vacation days over the holiday– out of town.

Toured ACD properties with Deb. Will be taking other members to review parcels throughout the year as their schedules allow.

### **PRIVATE OWNERSHIPS**

Dusty Arsno – harvest project and carbon credits.

Eric Waltz – forest management

Paul Taylor - forest management

Mary Ellen Boucher – Tree order

Jim Goetz – Tree order

Ellsworth School – Assisting with management. Excessive storm damage – have been working with Ron Hilton with cleanup and marketing of salvaged material.

FYI – The ACD has a long-term management agreement with the Ellsworth School

District. They have 3 parcels 150 acres +/-.

### **COUNTY FOREST ACTIVITIES**

#### **LEWIS ROAD**

Closed out Lewis Road harvest project. Sent summary letter to the BOC. In the process of updating forest management plan.

## RED PINE PROJECT

In the process of setting up several red pine thinning projects on county lands. This includes review of resource, property line establishments, marking of sale boundaries and trees, marketing wood products, and contractual agreements.

Prepared action item for BOC regarding pine thinning at hawk lake and valley road.

## GLACIAL HILLS

Removed large deer blind reported on glacial hills property. Looking for owner – will return to them if I can. They will be required to remove the constructed platform prior to the return of their stuff.

FYI – The forester is responsible for the management and maintenance of the forest

Acreages known as Glacial Hills.

## STAR 40

Met with Randy Keen (Arouco Forester) regarding storm damage harvest pending. Spring of 2026.

## HAWK LAKE

Met with Wes Wendover procurement forester with Biewer Lumber. Regarding pine thinning at Hawk Lake.

FYI- The hawk lake pine is large and economically mature. It is my goal to conduct a

Thinning this winter– likely the final thinning here and plant trees in the spring.

## VALLEY ROAD PINE PLANTATION

This is a 20-acre plantation off Valley Road east of Mancelona. Will combine this thinning with the Hawk Lake project.

GRASS RIVER – Agreed to assist them to assist them with updating management plan.

CEDAR RIVER – Making plans to address bridge repairs within the cedar river natural area. Currently we are having discussions with Jennifer Flynn from the S.E.E.D. organization (youth organization teaching working skills to young adults). They may have the capacity to do the repairs?). I would like to pay for bridge repairs with the Jabbara Donation Fund.

## FORESTRY ISSUES

Forestry Budget – requested that the 2025 and 2026 forestry budget be included on the January 2026 agenda and reviewed.

Forestry Checking Account - requested that the forestry checking account be included on the January 2026 agenda and reviewed. Maybe set some policies for its usage in the future?

Forestry Job Description – Working on forestry job description of 2026. May have a draft by the board meeting? See last board correspondence.

Forestry Annual Report – I see the county has put out a request for 2025 annual reports. They are to be done prior to July 16<sup>th</sup>, 2026. I will begin the preparation of the forestry report.

MIKE MERIWETHER

FORESTER

## ACD AGENDA ITEM

January 28<sup>th</sup> meeting 2026

### FORESTRY PROGRAM BUDGET DISCUSSION

Submitted By Mike Meriwether Forester

To ACD BOARD

The forestry program has been utilized as a pathway toward the delivery of conservation practices throughout the county. It has provided technical services to state, federal and local governmental units, non-profits organizations, schools, and private ownerships. The ACD has been able to retain its forestry program despite funding challenges. Over the years the ACD has funded forestry through state and federal grants, revenue sharing via timber sales, donations and service charges.

Today the forestry program is funded through a contractual agreement with the county. The agreement is aimed at the management and maintenance of county owned properties. In addition, the ACD can provide services to the community at large.

### ACD OWNERSHIP OF THE FORESTRY PROGRAM

It is important that the ACD have some financial ownership of the program. This has historically been done through donations, service charges, grants, mileage monies and other revenues as allocated by the ACD Board.

1. It should not be the responsibility of Antrim County to fund the program in its entirety.
2. DISCUSSION - Joint financial ownership is recommended.

### EXAMPLES:

In 2022 the forestry budget request to Antrim County was \$ 77, 274.00. An additional \$35,870.00 was contributed by the ACD. This included the purchase of the Ford truck used for forestry.

1. Overhead costs were also covered by mileage dollars I believe. Things like phone, internet, printing, copies, workers comp and any administrative costs. I believe this was the purpose of the mileage.
2. DISCUSSION – Should ACD be utilizing mileage dollars and other revenues to fund some of the forestry expenses?

**Forestry Background:**

The Forestry program has also been county funded for the past 18 plus years. The forester is tasked with managing the county forest lands for timber harvests and all county property for tree health and safety. All revenue generated from timber harvests are sent directly to the County Forestry Fund. Additionally, the forester provides guidance to private landowners who request such help. The Forester also fields questions about tree diseases/pests from all citizens of Antrim County, whether they have one tree on their property or 100 acres of forest land.

**Forestry Program - (101000-966-956.008)**

Antrim Conservation District requests \$77,294 from Antrim County to carry out the Forestry services Antrim County for 2022. This budget is the same as last year's request. It should be noted that ACD purchased a new (used) vehicle in 2019 with its own reserves for the Forestry Program. **Revenue generated through timber sales to the county has averaged \$40,740 per year over the last 10 years** Below is a breakdown of the Forestry Program funding needs for 2022.

Forestry 2022		
Category	County Request	ACD Funded
Wage 1	\$ 52,000	
Wage 1 Taxes	\$ 3,640	
Health Insurance	\$ 17,688	
Retirement	\$ 1,560	
Travel (Mileage, Vehicle Fuel)	\$ 1,300	
Vehicle Insurance	\$ 1,106	
Professional Development		\$ 500
Phone, Cell, Internet		\$ 1,150
Printing, Copying, Postage		\$ 100
Vehicle (new-used in 2019)		\$ 23,357
Workers Comp & Liability Ins. (1/5)		\$ 743
Building Maintenance (1/5)		\$ 1,600
Administrative & Finance Support (1/10)		\$ 5,155
Education & Outreach Programming Support (1/5)		\$ 3,265
<b>Total Request to County</b>	<b>\$ 77,294</b>	<b>\$ 35,870</b>
Reflects no increase from 2021		

In 2024, the forestry request for funding was \$ 85,648.00. There was a wage increase and a slight increase in health insurance.

1. The ACD did not reflect matching funds. It appears that the County paid all expenses for the program.
2. DISCUSSION – should the ACD be utilizing milage and other funds to help reduce the cost of program delivery?

## Antrim Conservation District County Appropriations Request for 2024

### FORESTRY PROGRAM

The ACD Forestry program has been county funded for close to twenty years. The forester is tasked with managing the county forest lands for timber harvests and all county property for tree health and safety. All revenue generated from timber harvests is directed to the Antrim County Forestry Fund. The forester provides technical guidance and fields questions about tree diseases/pests from citizens of Antrim County and teaches at workshops or events pertaining to forestry issues. The ACD supports the Forestry Program with millage funds for education and outreach purposes. The appropriation budget request below reflects an increase of \$2,710 from the previous year for the Forestry program.

2024 FORESTRY PROGRAM BUDGET	Amount Requested
Forester Wage	\$53,456
Forester Wage Tax	\$4,089
Health Insurance	\$18,000
Retirement	\$1,603
Travel (Mileage, Vehicle Fuel)	\$2,000
Vehicle Maintenance & Insurance	\$1,500
Training/Professional Development	\$500
Phone, Cell, Internet	\$1,400
Printing, Copying, Postage	\$600
Workers Comp & Liability Insurance	\$1,200
Building & Utilities cost share	\$1,300
<b>Total Appropriation Request</b>	<b>\$85,648</b>

In 2025, the forestry request for funding was \$ 98,169.00. Looks like there was a substantial increase in health insurance. Tax withholding went down. There was also a \$7,500.00 line item for invasive species program management.

1. Invasive species allocation. I do not believe this is the appropriate place for this request. AND I'm not sure it was approved by the BOC? I (the forester) put in a separate budget request for county forest land activities. Things like property maintenance/ surveys, equipment etc. Any special projects occurring on county forests should be budgeted through this procedure.
2. DISCUSSION – How was the Invasive species monies spent?
3. Again, no matching funds were identified. It appears the county bore all cost of the program.

4. DISCUSSION – SAME – Should the ACD be utilizing some of its own revenues for forestry?

**Antrim Conservation District  
County Appropriation Request for 2025**

**FORESTRY PROGRAM**

The success of the ACD Forestry program that has managed county forests for close to twenty years is due to ongoing positive support and funding from the county. The ACD forester is tasked with managing county forest lands for timber harvests and all county property for tree health and safety. All revenue generated from timber harvests is directed to the Antrim County Forestry Fund. The ACD forester provides technical guidance and fields questions about tree diseases/pests from citizens of Antrim County and teaches at workshops or events pertaining to forestry issues. The ACD forester is supportive of developing an invasive species management plan for county properties and this request includes funding to implement management planning for survey and treatment in order to reduce environmental, public, and economic harm on county properties. The appropriation budget request below reflects an increase of \$5,021 for employee direct expenses from the previous year and \$7,500 which is dedicated to invasive species management.

2025 FORESTRY PROGRAM BUDGET	Amount Requested
Forester Wage	\$55,059
Forester Wage Tax	\$3,360
Health Insurance	\$21,600
Retirement	\$1,850
Travel (Mileage, Vehicle Fuel)	\$2,000
Vehicle Maintenance & Insurance	\$1,500
Training/Professional Development	\$500
Phone, Cell, Internet	\$1,400
Printing, Copying, Postage	\$600
Workers Comp & Liability Insurance	\$1,400
Building & Utilities cost share	\$1,400
County Property Invasive Species Program Management	\$7,500
<b>Total Appropriation Request</b>	<b>\$98,169</b>

In 2026, It appears that the ACD was approved for a \$115,000.00 forestry allocation. I do not have an itemized account for these dollars.

1. Review of the itemized budget for forestry recommended.
2. DISCUSSION

**SUMMARY**

In my opinion it is important for the ACD to have some buy in of the forestry program. This indicates that the ACD supports the program and is willing to contribute financially. It is also significant that the ACD be able to show the county that they are responsible with the public funds being allocated to them. It is my understanding that the public

voted for an operational milage to assist the ACD in delivering conservation programs. Taking pressure off the County's general fund. All the programs delivered by the ACD should benefit from this milage.

I would recommend that the ACD review the actual expenditures of the forestry program. The above information may not be accurate. It was the only information available at this time.

I will look forward to disusing this and other issues regarding the forestry program,

Mike Meriwether



GRETCHEN WHITMER  
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MICHIGAN  
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

DR. TIM BORING  
DIRECTOR

## Conservation Programs Unit Partner Report – January 2026

### Success Stories:

- Congratulations to Saginaw Conservation District for receiving a 2025 Michigan Association of Environmental Professionals Environmental Education grant to sponsor two Envirothon teams and provide team t-shirts!
- Conservation District Employees of Michigan (CDEM) awarded the 2025 'Regional Employees of the Year' awards during the MACD Fall Convention; CDEM recognized **Jen Ricker-Feak** (R1; Iron Baraga CD), **Madeline Drent** (R2; Chippewa Luce Mackinac CD), **Rachel Straughen** (R3; Grand Traverse CD), **Michael Ramsey** (R4; Mecosta CD), **Jacob Grochowski** (R5; Presque Isle CD), **Jami VanScoyoc** (R6; Arenac CD), **Sarah Bowman** (R7; Ottawa CD), **Emily Kerlikowske** (R8; Berrien CD), **Emily Veillette** (R9; Lapeer CD), and **Jackson Cenusa** (R10; Monroe CD). Additionally, **Jen Ricker-Feak** was awarded the overall 'Conservation District Employee of the Year' award. These staff members were nominated by their peers.
- Implementing conservation practices is a foundational part of the [Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program](#) (MAEAP) and conservation districts are key to helping farmers bring those practices to life. At the MACD Fall Convention, MAEAP recognized **Morgan Swartzendruber** (Huron Conservation District) with the 'MAEAP Statewide Achievement Award'. Additionally, certificates were provided to 10 CTAP technicians for recognition on achieving their first MAEAP verification.
- Also at the MACD Fall Convention, MACD President, Jerry Miller, recognized **Allegan Conservation District** as the 'Conservation District of the Year', **Chandra Kinney** (Kalamazoo Conservation District) as the 'Emerging Leader of the Year', **Shannon Brings** as the 'Director of the Year' (Washtenaw Conservation District), **Patricia Osburn** as the 'Champion of Conservation', and **Growing Pontiac** as the 'Champion of Conservation Partner'. The 'Presidential Citation for Exemplary Support and Service' went to **John Switzer**, MDARD's Conservation Programs Unit Manager.

### Partner Updates / Reminders:

- Please be sure to use any new reporting templates that have been sent out with FY'26 grants as there were updates to these forms. Also, please review the reporting reminders each quarter prior to submission to the appropriate grant mailbox. Quarter

one reporting, including technician employee development plans (EDPs), is due by **January 15<sup>th</sup>**.

- MDARD needs your help tracking the successes of CDs to understand how Operating Grant funds impact Michigan. Data is gleaned from the Operating Grant accomplishment reports. Grantees are required to submit the report quarterly to approve grant payments. It is important that all the questions are answered with accurate data. This year, reports will be submitted in [Microsoft Forms](#). If you have questions about the report, contact your Regional Coordinator. CPU hosted a webinar on December 3<sup>rd</sup> to discuss this year’s reporting; the recording is available. The FY’22-25 Operating Grant highlights for Michigan’s Conservation Districts are as follows:

<b>CD Operations Funding Accomplishments</b>	<b>FY 2022</b>	<b>FY</b>	<b>FY</b>	<b>FY</b>
Number of new grant proposals submitted	249	288	275	367
Number of new grants received	168 (67%)	172 (60%)	147 (53%)	227 (62%)
Total funds leveraged due to the Operations	\$11.8M	\$12.9M	\$16.6M	\$20.9M
Number of districts with millage support from	N/A	13	13	14
Number of board meetings conducted	751	721	736	813
Number of municipality meetings attended	1,024	1,350	1,146	1,302
Number of legislative meetings attended	271	229	697	325
Number of FTE employees	231	299	293	320
Number of seasonal employees	86	87	69	58
Attrition - number of re-filled technician	N/A	32	49	36
Attrition - number of re-filled administrative	N/A	5	23	11
Number of programs	443	443	530	531
Number of outreach events/workshops hosted	1,174	1,484	1,791	2,424
Number of outreach events/workshops	69,111	99,675	128,95	153,43
Number of trees & plants sold	N/A	2,010,2 24	1,457,3 96	1,338,2 93

- Save the date: MACD will be hosting Legislative Day in Lansing on March 11<sup>th</sup>.

**Educational Opportunities:**

- Invasive species pose a threat to Michigan's environment, economy, and sometimes even human health. The [NotMISpecies](#) webinar series will explore how agencies,

universities and locally led organizations are working together to protect Michigan's natural resources through the Michigan Invasive Species Program. Recorded versions of all previous webinars are available:

**Wednesday, January 14th, 9:00 - 10:00 EST**

[In a stranglehold: Can we prevent invasive mussels from muscling in on native populations?](#)

- The National Conservation Planning Partnership (NCP) is launching a new pilot program featuring a streamlined, hybrid training model designed to better support conservation planners on their path to certification. This pilot program offers step-by-step support and a clear path to continue the vital work of conservation. Applications are now open to be a part of the first session. Held in conjunction with NACD's Annual Meeting, the session will be February 15-19 in San Antonio, TX. Because this is a pilot program, space is limited. Learn more and submit an application [on NCP's website](#).
  - Another similar training will be held during NACD's 2026 Summer Meeting, which will be held in Grand Rapids on July 17-22, 2026. More information on that training will be available soon.
- MSU Extension is offering their [Introduction to Lakes Online](#) course. This introductory six-week online class is designed for anyone interested in gaining a greater appreciation for inland lakes. Registration is open now through January 27<sup>th</sup>. The cost of the course is \$115 per person. Register by January 6<sup>th</sup> for an early bird price of \$95. A limited number of scholarships are available.
- EGLE released the [2025 Michigan State of the Great Lakes Report](#). The annual report explores major accomplishments, issues, initiatives, and challenges related to the health and sustainability of our Great Lakes.

**Fun Facts for Conservation Districts:**

- The conservation district board of directors is entrusted with the authority to establish policies to govern the district. Board policy establishes the parameters and guidelines for board directors, committees, and staff. All policy decisions should be made by majority vote of the board and recorded in meeting minutes. Adopted policies should be reviewed annually. The board should ensure policies have the following qualities:
  1. Policies are thorough and complete, covering all likely scenarios and questions. Remember policies are:
    - Answers to questions before they are asked
    - Solutions to situations before they arise
    - Defined set of procedures to follow – before they are needed
    - The 'rules of the game' and define who must follow them
  2. Policy language is clear, succinct, and understandable
  3. Policies are fair and equitable
  4. Policies are legal and current with the latest regulations and laws. They provide for privacy, security, and confidentiality when required or as prudent.

**Funding Opportunities:**

- NACD announced the [Technical Assistance](#) grants to support technical positions in high-need areas, strengthening conservation delivery. Applications *have been extended* until **January 8<sup>th</sup>**.
- MSU announced the [Clean Boats, Clean Waters grant program](#) for projects that focus on outreach and prevention pathways for aquatic invasive species. Applications are due **January 30<sup>th</sup>**.
- EGLE announced the [Coastal Management Program grant funding](#) to assist in the development of vibrant and resilient coastal communities through the protection and restoration of our sensitive coastal resources and biologically diverse ecosystems. Applications *have been extended* until **January 30<sup>th</sup>**.
- MDARD's Regenerative Agriculture Program is launching a new grant opportunity in early 2026. The Regenerative Farmer Network Grant (RFNG) will provide up to \$50,000 annually to new or existing networks of at least five farmers to implement regenerative practices while educating and engaging other farmers on regenerative agriculture. Conservation Districts can participate and receive funding as network collaborators. Collaborators serve as the fiduciary and can support the farmer-led networks in a number of ways. Applications will be accepted from **February 1 - 27**. More information is available on [MDARD's RFNG web page](#). In the meantime, please feel free to email questions to the [MDARD Regenerative Agriculture Program](#).
- NFWF announced the [Healthy American Forests Initiative](#) RFP to support watershed restoration and vegetation management projects on National Forest System lands to achieve a healthy forest ecosystem. Applications *have been extended* until **March 17<sup>th</sup>**.

**260000000031**

**Grant Agreement**

**Regarding the**

**Conservation District Operating Grant Program**

**Between the**

**Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development**

**and**

**Antrim Conservation District**

**October 1, 2025 – September 30, 2026**

**Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development  
Conservation District Operating Grant Program**

By authority granted under Act No14 of the Public Acts of 2025, the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, (hereinafter the "Grantor") hereby agrees to provide the Antrim Conservation District (hereinafter, the "Grantee") with grant assistance subject to the terms and conditions, and limitations as set forth herein.

The maximum amount of grant assistance hereby offered is \$40,000.00.

The grant shall be effective from October 1, 2025 through September 30, 2026.

If the project is not completed in the initial period, a grant extension may be considered by the Grantor. Approval of an extension is not guaranteed and is dependent on the Grantee's compliance with the enclosed Terms and Conditions. If the Grantee requires an extension, the Grantee should contact the Grant Administrator as soon as it is evident an extension is needed. Any request for extension must be made to the Grant Administrator in writing before the expiration of the grant.

Funds will be made available for this program in accordance with the attached Terms and Conditions.

This grant is valid contingent upon the availability of funds. If the Grantor's funds are reduced by the Legislature as part of a budget reduction or reduced for any other reason, this grant may be reduced or canceled.

This grant does not commit the State of Michigan or the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development to approve requests for additional funds not contained in this grant.

Grantee accepts the grant and agrees that the funds made available through the grant will be used only as set forth herein.

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Adrienne Wolff, Chair  
Antrim Conservation District

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Michael Alexander, Director  
Conservation Stewardship Division

Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development  
Grant Agreement

**TITLE:** Conservation District Operating Grant Program

**GRANTEE/ADDRESS:** Melissa Zelenak, District Manager  
Antrim Conservation District  
4820 Stover Road  
Bellaire, MI, 49615  
Phone: 231-533-8363  
E-mail: melissaz@macd.org

**GRANT ADMINISTRATOR/  
ADDRESS:** Stacy Smith  
Michigan Department of Agriculture  
and Rural Development  
Bureau of Environment and Sustainability  
P.O. Box 30017  
Lansing, Michigan 48909  
Phone: 517-930-1223  
E-Mail: smiths58@michigan.gov

**TOTAL AUTHORIZED  
BUDGET:** \$40,000.00

**GRANT NUMBER:** 260000000031

## I. GENERAL TERMS AND CONDITIONS

### A. Record Retention

Grantee shall retain all financial reports, supporting documents and statistical records for a period of seven years after the close of the grant. Grantee shall also require all subcontractors retained for the performance of this grant to retain all financial reports, supporting documents and statistical records for a period of seven or greater years after the close of the grant. The retention period starts from the date of receipt of the Final Report by the Grant Administrator. Examples of documents to be retained might include but are not limited to: original and/or electronic invoices, billings, packing slips, reports, checking account statements, accounts payable records, contracts and sub-contracts.

### B. Procurement

The Grantee agrees that all procurement transactions involving the use of funds from this grant shall be conducted in a manner that provides maximum open and free competition.

### C. Grant Changes

The Grantee must obtain prior written approval for program changes from the Grant Administrator. Grant changes include:

1. Changes in substance in the program activities.
2. Additions or deletions in the project work plan or location.
3. Any single or cumulative change in the budget of \$1,000 or more.

### D. Regulation Compliance

The Grantee and Grantee's contractors and subcontractors are responsible for compliance with all federal and state laws and municipal ordinances and regulations that in any manner affect the work or performance of this grant and shall at all times carefully observe and comply with all rules, ordinances and regulations.

### E. Non-Discrimination Clause

In the performance of this grant, the Grantee agrees not to discriminate against any employee or applicant for employment, with respect to their hire, tenure, terms, conditions or privileges of employment, or any matter directly or indirectly related to employment, because of race, color, religion, national origin, ancestry, age, sex, height, weight, marital status, physical or mental disability unrelated to the individual's ability to perform the duties of the particular job or position. The Grantee further agrees that every subcontract entered into for the performance of this Grant Agreement will contain a provision requiring non-discrimination in employment, as herein specified, that is binding upon each subcontractor. This covenant is required pursuant to the Elliot Larsen Civil Rights Act, 1976 PA 453, as amended, MCL 37.2101 *et seq.*, and the Persons with Disabilities Civil Rights Act, 1976 PA 220, as amended, MCL 37.1101, *et seq.* Any breach of this covenant may be regarded as default under Section J and grounds for cancelling the Grant Agreement.

**F. Unfair Labor Practices**

The Grantee shall abide by Act No. 278 of the Public Acts of 1980, as amended, MCL 423.321 *et seq.*

**G. Liability Insurance**

The Grantee shall provide and maintain insurance in an amount sufficient to protect from claims that may arise out of or result from the Grantee's operations under this grant, or for anyone whose acts they are legally liable.

**H. Indemnification**

Each party to this Grant Agreement must seek its own legal representation and bear its own costs in any litigation that may arise from performance of this grant. It is specifically understood and agreed that neither party will indemnify the other party in such litigation and that each party shall be responsible for any judgments entered against it.

**I. Use of Material**

Unless otherwise specified in this Agreement, the Grantee may release information or material developed under this Agreement, provided it is acknowledged that the State funded all or a portion of its development.

The State, and federal awarding agency, if applicable, retains a royalty-free, nonexclusive and irrevocable right to reproduce, publish, and use in whole or in part, and authorize others to do so, any copyrightable material or research data submitted under this grant whether or not the material is copyrighted by the Grantee or another person. The Grantee will only submit materials that the State can use in accordance with this paragraph.

**J. Assignability**

The Grantee shall not assign this Agreement or assign or delegate any of its duties or obligations under this Agreement to any other party without the prior written consent of the State. The State does not assume responsibility regarding the contractual relationships between the Grantee and any subcontractor.

**K. Iran Sanctions Act**

By signing this Agreement the Grantee is certifying that it is not an Iran linked business, and that its contractors are not Iran linked businesses, as defined in MCL 129.312.

**L. Subcontracts**

The State reserves the right to deny the use of any consultant, contractor, associate, or other personnel to perform any portion of the project. The Grantee is solely responsible for all contractual activities performed under this Agreement. Further, the State will consider the Grantee to be the sole point of contact with regard to contractual matters, including payment of any and all charges resulting from the anticipated Grant. All subcontractors used by the

Grantee in performing the project shall be subject to the provisions of this Agreement and shall be qualified to perform the duties required.

**M. Anti-Lobbying**

If all or a portion of this Agreement is funded with federal funds, then in accordance with 2 CFR 200, as appropriate, the Grantee shall comply with the Anti-Lobbying Act, which prohibits the use of all project funds regardless of source, to engage in lobbying the state or federal government or in litigation against the State. Further, the Grantee shall require that the language of this assurance be included in the award documents of all subawards at all tiers.

If all or a portion of this Agreement is funded with state funds, then the Grantee shall not use any of the grant funds awarded in this Agreement for the purpose of lobbying as defined in the State of Michigan's lobbying statute, MCL 4.415(2). "Lobbying" means communicating directly with an official of the executive branch of state government or an official in the legislative branch of state government for the purpose of influencing legislative or administrative action." The Grantee shall not use any of the grant funds awarded in this Agreement for the purpose of litigation against the State. Further, the Grantee shall require that language of this assurance be included in the award documents of all subawards at all tiers.

**N. Conflict of Interest**

No member of the legislative, judicial, or executive branch of state or federal governments or any local unit of government official shall personally benefit from this Grant Agreement. No member of the Grantee's Board of Directors, its employees, partner agencies or their families shall have any personal benefit from this Grant Agreement.

**O. Cancellation**

This Grant Agreement may be canceled by 30 day written notice by either party. If canceled, Grantee must provide a final report and invoice within 30 days of cancellation.

Cancellation or reduction of the grant by the Grantor may be for default by the Grantee, lack of further need for the service at the location named in the contract, or conviction of criminal offense(s) as set forth below.

Default is defined as the failure of the Grantee to fulfill the obligations of the Grant Agreement. In case of default by the Grantee, the Grantor may cancel the Grant Agreement immediately and all unused grant funds must be returned by the Grantee immediately. All disallowed costs and overpayments shall also be returned by the Grantee within 30 days of cancellation.

In the event the Grantor no longer needs the service specified in the grant due to department changes, changes in laws, rules or regulations, relocation of offices, or no longer has appropriations to fund the grant, the Grantor may cancel or

reduce the grant by giving the Grantee written notice of such cancellation or reduction 30 days prior to the date of cancellation or reduction. All costs incurred by the Grantee between the grant cancellation or reduction notice and the cancellation or reduction date, with the exception of previously budgeted personnel costs and non-cancelable obligations, must be approved by the Grant Administrator prior to their incurrence. No costs shall be allowed after the grant has been cancelled.

The Grantor may immediately cancel the grant without further liability to the State, its departments, agencies and employees if the Grantee, an officer of the Grantee, or an owner of the Grantee is convicted of a criminal offense incident to the application for or performance of a State, public, or private contract or subcontract; or convicted of a criminal offense including but not limited to any of the following: embezzlement; theft; forgery; bribery; falsification or destruction of records; receiving stolen property; attempting to influence a public employee to breach the ethical conduct standards for State employees; violation of a state or federal antitrust statute; or any other criminal offense which in the sole discretion of the Grantor, reflects on the Grantee's business integrity.

**P. Closeout**

Upon issuance of final payment from the State, the Grantee releases the State of all claims against the State arising under this Agreement. Unless otherwise provided in this Agreement or by State law, final payment under this Agreement shall not constitute a waiver of the State's claims against the Grantee.

The Grantee shall immediately refund to the State any payments in excess of the costs allowed by this Agreement.

**Q. Electronic Funds Transfer**

In accordance with Act No. 207 of the Public Acts of 2004, payments under this Grant Agreement must be processed by electronic funds transfer (EFT). Grantees are required to register to receive payments by EFT at the SIGMA website <https://sigma.michigan.gov/webapp/PRDVSS2X1/AltSelfService> .

**R. Freedom of Information**

This is a grant from public funds and records associated with it are subject to disclosure under Michigan's Freedom of Information Act.

## II. SPECIAL TERMS & CONDITIONS

### A. Statement of Purpose

The conservation district and the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (MDARD) share a common objective to encourage the wise use and management of the natural resources of Michigan. The purpose of this grant is to establish minimum conservation district operational requirements consistent with the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act, 1994 PA 451 Part 93, as amended, commonly referred to as Conservation District Law, and to provide support for the basic operations of the conservation district. These funds shall be used by the conservation district to carry out operational duties associated with natural resource management activities and to provide information, education, and technical assistance to the conservation district community including private landowners, municipalities, other local units of government and natural resource professionals, the private sector, and other citizens.

### B. Statement of Work

The role of the conservation district is to perform resource management activities that serve the public interest, are needed, but cannot be done efficiently by normal market forces, and which the private sector cannot, or will not, do because the activities will not generate an immediate profit. Implementation of this grant will be mutually beneficial in achieving the common objective of encouraging the wise use and management of the natural resources of Michigan. The expected outcomes and goals for the basic operation of the conservation district are:

1. To provide citizens easy access to natural resource management assistance.
2. Assess and analyze local natural resource management needs.
3. Provide basic resource management information and assistance uniformly across the state.
4. Implement natural resource management based on the needs identified.
5. Continually improve the capacity of the district to deliver natural resource management assistance.

The Grantee agrees to perform and record all work activities as defined in the Special Terms and Conditions. Additionally, the Grantee agrees to implement duties and responsibilities under Conservation District Law, Public Act 451 of 1994, Part 93 as amended.

The MDARD Regional Coordinator (RC) will provide coordination among the conservation district staff, board members, and program management staff.

#### Services Provided

1. The Grantees primary service area is Antrim County(s).

2. Conduct regular board meetings in a manner consistent with the Open Meetings Act. This includes posting requirements and establishing a board meeting schedule at the beginning of the district's fiscal year (FY) or calendar year.
  - a. Annually designate a board chair.
3. Conduct an annual meeting and election, as necessary, as defined by Conservation District Law and consistent with the procedures identified in the Conservation District Operations Manual.
4. Approve an annual budget and appropriations act for FY26 that reflects all expenditures and income. Follow the Appropriations Act process and amend the budget as necessary throughout the year. The approved budget must be submitted to [MDA-ESD-Grants@michigan.gov](mailto:MDA-ESD-Grants@michigan.gov) with a copy to the MDARD RC.
5. Conduct a conservation needs assessment (CNA; formerly the Natural Resource Assessment) unless one has been conducted within the last five years. The CNA shall be developed through broad-based community participation and in accordance with the procedures identified in the Conservation District Operations Manual. A summary of the completed/existing CNAs shall be submitted to [MDA-ESD-Grants@michigan.gov](mailto:MDA-ESD-Grants@michigan.gov) with a copy to the MDARD RC by July 7<sup>th</sup>, 2026, unless an extension, based on significant progress towards completion, has been approved in writing by the Grantor.
6. A five-year, long-range plan shall be developed to meet the long-term goals of the district, unless one has been developed within the last five years, using a template provided by the grantor. It should list the goals, activities, funding sources, partners, and timeline that will be used to achieve those goals, for the upcoming five years, and based on the most recent Conservation Needs Assessment. The current long-range plan shall be submitted to [MDA-ESD-Grants@michigan.gov](mailto:MDA-ESD-Grants@michigan.gov) with a copy to the MDARD RC by July 7<sup>th</sup>, 2026.
7. An annual business plan shall be developed to meet the goals of the district using a template provided by the Grantor. It should list the goals, activities, funding sources, partners, and timeline that will be used to achieve those goals, for the upcoming year, FY27. The annual business plan shall be submitted to [MDA-ESD-Grants@michigan.gov](mailto:MDA-ESD-Grants@michigan.gov) with a copy to the MDARD RC by October 5<sup>th</sup>, 2026.
8. Provide citizens access to natural resource management assistance, education, and referrals. Implement management activities based on the needs identified. Continually improve the capacity of the district to deliver natural resource management assistance.

9. Cooperate and collaborate across conservation districts including promotion and participation in other district, USDA, and MDARD programs as appropriate.
10. Develop or update as necessary and approve a District Policy Manual including the following policies:
  - a. Freedom of Information (FOIA)
  - b. Credit Card (if the Grantee uses a Credit Card)
  - c. Investment Practices (even if the Grantee does not have investments)

Program Administration

11. Utilize QuickBooks as the accounting software for tracking revenue and expenses against this grant, or other accounting software approved by the Grantor.
12. A conservation district representative shall be available to meet with the MDARD RC a minimum of two times per year for Operational Element review meetings. The purpose of these meetings is to inform MDARD staff of the district's status and progress toward deliverables.

Training & Employee Development

13. A conservation district representative shall participate in all required training sessions as determined by the Grantor. The MDARD RC may approve exceptions to this requirement in the event of prevailing circumstances.

Outreach / Promotion Efforts

14. Assist in promoting local, state, and federal conservation programs by participating in outreach and community education activities.
15. Advocate for a strong natural resource conservation program by keeping appropriate boards, landowners, legislators, county commissioners, and other key stakeholders apprised of conservation activities within the district.

**C. Budget**

This is a deliverables-based grant funded by state funds. The amount of money allocated under this grant shall not be used by local conservation districts to replace any money received from local sources.

<u>Program Administration</u>	<u>\$40,000.00</u>
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$40,000.00</b>

### Program Administration

Program Administration costs may include (but are not limited to):

- District manager salary, taxes, and benefits
- Training, including required conferences
- Travel (mileage, meals, and overnights)
- Office space, office supplies, and equipment including accounting software
- Postage, printing, and materials to carry out programs
- Match as leverage for other grants
- Audit expenses

### Unemployment Insurance

If the Grantee is registered to be a reimbursing employer under the Michigan Employment Security Act, no unemployment costs may be charged to this grant.

## **D. Payment Schedule**

Payments will be split into five equal payments of \$8,000 each and made available as defined in Section II-F.

Significant progress toward meeting the deliverables must be achieved to receive payments.

## **E. Eligibility**

As a governmental subdivision of this State, the Grantee agrees to maintain compliance with all requirements of the Conservation District Law as amended.

The project will be subject to audit by the state who may review the adequacy of the financial management/reporting system during, or at any time subsequent to, the award.

In order for MDARD to sign and execute this grant award the Grantee must submit the following eligibility items:

1. The cover letter of an Independent Auditor's Report from a Certified Public Accountant (CPA) which indicates the Grantee had a successful audit in accordance with auditing standards generally accepted in the United States of America for fiscal year 2024 or 2025, or a copy of the engagement letter from a CPA to the Grantee indicating an audit will be completed for fiscal year 2025. If an engagement letter is submitted, the Grantee must provide the cover letter from the completed audit within six months of the start date of this grant.
2. The Grantee's approved budget setting forth the purpose and amount of the expenses expected to be incurred, and the source and amount of revenue expected to be received, during the ensuing fiscal year.

This documentation shall be submitted to the Grantor at [MDA-ESD-Grants@michigan.gov](mailto:MDA-ESD-Grants@michigan.gov) with a copy to the MDARD RC, prior to or at the time of the execution of this grant agreement.

## **F. Reporting**

The Grantor will supply a tracking report for the Grantee to submit accomplishments on a quarterly basis. Tracking reports, board minutes, and quarterly invoices shall be submitted to [MDA-ESD-Grants@michigan.gov](mailto:MDA-ESD-Grants@michigan.gov) with a copy to the MDARD RC. The final reports are to be submitted no later than October 5, 2026.

Submit a copy of approved board meeting minutes to the Grantor and MDARD RC. If a monthly board meeting is not held, the Grantee must notify the Grantor by email to [MDA-ESD-Grants@michigan.gov](mailto:MDA-ESD-Grants@michigan.gov).

1. The first payment will be made once the grant is executed by MDARD and upon receipt of the following:
  - a. FY26 approved budget.
  - b. Cover letter of a completed FY24 audit or an engagement letter for a FY25 audit.
  - c. An invoice.
2. The second payment will be made upon receipt of the following, which are due January 15, 2026:
  - a. Quarterly tracking report for October, November, and December 2025.
  - b. Approved board minutes for the months of September, October, and November 2025.
  - c. An invoice.
3. The third payment will be made upon receipt of the following, which are due April 15, 2026:
  - a. Quarterly tracking report for January, February, and March 2026.
  - b. Cover letter of completed FY25 CPA audit (if applicable).
  - c. Approved board minutes for the months of December 2025, January and February 2026.
  - d. An invoice.
4. The fourth payment will be made upon receipt of the following, which are due July 15, 2026:
  - a. Quarterly tracking report for April, May, and June 2026.
  - b. Completed five-year, long-range plan template.
  - c. Summary of a completed conservation needs assessment.
  - d. Approved board minutes for the months of March, April, and May 2026.
  - e. An invoice.

5. The final payment will be made upon receipt of the following, which are due October 5, 2026:
  - a. Quarterly tracking report for July, August, and September 2026.
  - b. Annual business plan for FY27.
  - c. Approved board minutes for the months of June, July, and August 2026.
  - d. An invoice.

Failure to submit the required documents and reports in a timely manner may jeopardize grant reimbursements and status.



# **Antrim Conservation District Personnel Policy / Employment Handbook**

DRAFT

## **13.00 Performance Evaluations Personnel Manual 2026**

Performance evaluations are TO BE COMPLETED BY BOTH THE EMPLOYEE AND THE REVIEWERS PRIOR TO THE FINAL EVALUATION INTERVIEW FOR A FULL AND OPEN DISCUSSION OF ANY ISSUES (POSITIVE & NEGATIVE) and used as the primary basis of evaluation and performance discussion to document competence, encourage self-improvement, and improve the operations and services of the District. They may also help the District to reach decisions of matters including, but not limited to, promotions, raises, dismissal, and retention of employees. Evaluations will be conducted by the Executive Director, the Human Resource Committee or the Board of Directors when other employees are involved but by either Human Resource Committee or the Board when the Executive Director is evaluated.

Performance evaluations templates will be given to each new employee during orientation and before each annual interview

Evaluations will be in writing (see evaluation form at end of this policy) and authored by the ACD team for the specific job description, work agreement and/or grant deliverables as necessary. If an employee's performance is below standard, then evaluations will be more frequent until performance is up to par. The evaluation will become a permanent part of the employee's personnel file BUT **NEVER TO BE PUBLICLY FILED, POSTED OR REFERENCED.**

If an employee is performing below par in any area, the evaluator will put in written steps for the employee to follow to improve their performance. Failure to improve performance may result in termination of employment.

January 4, 2026

Subject: Governance Concerns

Dear Members of the Antrim Conservation District Board,

Over the past several months, the District has operated under extraordinary conditions involving facility safety concerns, environmental exposure, legal risk, and significant operational demands. During this period, and as demonstrated throughout my tenure, I have acted in good faith, within my executive authority, and in accordance with my obligations to protect staff safety, District assets, and institutional integrity.

This letter is to formally document governance and operational conditions that have affected executive effectiveness and organizational stability during this period:

Actions by individual Board members occurring outside established governance processes and without collective Board direction, contributing to fragmented authority and inconsistent or delayed decision-making.

Recent proceedings demonstrate challenges in governance structure and organizational alignment during an active crisis.

Procedural changes to Board discussion and voting practices implemented without prior agreement, adding complexity and extending meeting duration during a proceeding requiring focused decision-making.

Board and staff involvement in landlord communications and facility-related matters undertaken outside executive knowledge, departing from established governance roles and contributing to delays and operational uncertainty.

Inconsistent maintenance of staff–governance boundaries during proceedings, affecting organizational clarity.

Lack of a consistently applied chain of command, creating uncertainty regarding authority, accountability, and staff direction.

Ongoing operational involvement and facility-related actions by a long-tenured individual whose role is not part of the District’s formal governance structure, undertaken without executive or governance approval, contributing to risk and role ambiguity during a period of elevated risk.

The prolonged effort to address facility challenges resulting in compounded operational demands, including a full District relocation under compressed timelines during the year-end holiday and severe weather period.

For context, it is important to note that the environmental and facility issues described above, specifically lead contamination, did not originate during my tenure as Executive Director, nor

during the tenure of the current Board. These conditions reflect long term facility and operational circumstances that predate multiple governance cycles.

It is also important to note that the escalation of concerns with the landlord increased after the District formally notified the landlord of mold and lead discovery in the facility. Prior to that point no comparable disputes existed and a positive relationship was enjoyed for many years. Once these health and safety issues were identified and communicated, the District encountered increased resistance from the landlord resulting in additional operational strain and delayed resolution of District concerns.

Despite a formal legal request to the landlord outlining corrective actions, verified professional remediation and post-remediation testing clearance have not been completed. In addition, the Board formally requested from the landlord an indemnification agreement for the District and proof of liability insurance which has been ignored.

The District leased facility now has a documented history of environmental and safety concerns, including serious lead exposure risk. This is a result of District initiated testing and investigation of the building. As you are aware, I tested positive for lead exposure during my employment which heightened my deep concern for staff and public exposure, especially children and the elderly. Meanwhile, the landlord continues to use the facility and advertise public access.

Since the unexpected discovery and eventual reporting of extreme mold and lead conditions at the Stover Road facility, my priority has been to ensure a safe workplace environment for staff and the public. This has been accomplished by relocating the ACD, all while striving to accomplish regular district operations, year end functions, easing staff concerns, and working to improve operations. I respect the Board's decision to exit the building in order to protect people.

I would anticipate working long into retirement years and continuing my service to the District for the foreseeable future. However, based on the concerns shared in this letter, I have come to believe that the working relationship between the executive director's position and board leadership is broken.

Absent any changes, the appropriate next step is to discuss a structured separation to include a severance agreement allowing for an orderly transition and mitigation of institutional and personal risk. Such an agreement should include provisions for indemnification, non-retaliation, and related protections to ensure that no personal or professional risk arises from actions taken in good faith within the scope of my duties, or from governance actions or omissions.

Sincerely,

MZ

Melissa Zelenak  
Executive Director  
Antrim Conservation District