



Five-Year, Long-Range Plan (FY 2023 – FY 2027)

Schoolcraft Conservation District

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Organization of the Schoolcraft Conservation District:

A governmental subdivision of the State of Michigan and a public body corporate and politic, exercising public powers, as outlined in Conservation District Law, Act 463 of 1998.

- In March of 1965, in response to soil conservation concerns, agricultural leaders and other landholders of Schoolcraft County created the Schoolcraft Conservation District through county referendum. In 2018 an operational millage was passed by the residents of Schoolcraft County to help support the functions and services of the Conservation District.

Function of the Schoolcraft Conservation District:

To make available technical, financial, and educational resources, whatever their source, and focus or coordinate them so they meet the needs of local landowners in terms of conservation of soil, water, and related natural resources.

Mission of the Schoolcraft Conservation District:

- The mission of the Schoolcraft Conservation District is to promote and facilitate the wise use of natural resources in Schoolcraft County.

Vision of the Schoolcraft Conservation District:

- A self-sustaining Conservation District that educates and engages its constituents and drives on-the-ground activities addressing the resource needs of current and future generations.

Values of the Schoolcraft Conservation District:

Our work is guided and informed by our commitments to:

- **Environmental Stewardship:** We are committed to continually working toward sustainable preservation and use of our natural resources, through education, outreach, habitat enhancement, responsible land management, and/or the small actions we make day-to-day.
- **Collaboration:** We believe in the inherent value of diverse thinking and collective wisdom. Whether it be between ourselves, community members, or our partners, we welcome collaborative interaction and strive to make the best of use the contributions we receive—from wherever they might come.
- **Community Engagement:** Our organization, led by a board of locally elected directors, is here to serve the people of Schoolcraft County as we address issues that affect our constituents. We encourage community members to ask questions, voice their ideas, and engage in the services and programs we offer.
- **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion:** Diversity drives creative problem-solving and strengthens our conservation efforts in an intersectional world. We strive to foster belonging and empowerment by listening, welcoming, and engaging with diverse communities and perspectives.
- **Education and Outreach:** Public education and awareness are key factors in ensuring the preservation and wise use of our collective natural resources. We are dedicated to promoting outreach activities and community education in a way that encourages curiosity and engagement.
- **Transparency and Accountability:** As a government subdivision elected by and for the people, we have a duty to be honest with the public and accountable for our efforts. We seek to improve ourselves and our work through continuous reflection and evaluation.

- **Science and Resource Driven:** We use the science and resources available to guide our decisions on policy, strategy, and operations.
- **Achieving Lasting Results that Are Future-Oriented:** We plant trees so our children can enjoy the shade. Although meeting the needs of the present generation is important, we also acknowledge that we only have one earth, and as such make decisions with the goal of preserving that earth for the generations to come.
- **Active and Informed Leadership:** As stewards of our local ecology and representatives of the community, we acknowledge the responsibility we have to remain active in and knowledgeable about conservation.

Operations Priorities:

1. Build and maintain capacity
2. Streamline standard operations procedures
3. Foster collaboration between ourselves, the county, and existing and new partners
4. Increase community outreach and recognition

Natural Resource Priorities:

1. Forestry – Management and Recreation
2. Water Quality
3. Invasive Species
4. Recycling
5. Pollinator Habitat

Board Directed Priorities:

1. Agriculture and Homesteading
2. Wildlife Management

Measures of Success:

- Become a hub for technical support and service for community members. Increase awareness of services and programs, so that SCD becomes a valued community institution. Measured through an increase in site visit requests, technical requests, sales, and referrals.
- Increase impact of education and outreach through number of programs held, number of people reached, scholarship requests, and involvement with classrooms.
- FAP: Increase awareness of forestry programs available, measured by an increase of requested site visits, management of private lands in Schoolcraft County shown through QFP enrollments, forest management plans written, and outreach events held.
- USDA Farm Bill Assistance: Increased awareness of partnering agencies programs leading to increased enrollments in NRCS programs.
- On the ground projects undertaken that improve or protect natural resources, and facilitate lasting change. Measured by acres treated/restored, trees planted, people served, waste diverted, shoreline protected, and/or habitat increased.
- Service to a diverse public, regardless of land ownership status. Demonstrated through public attendance at outreach events, volunteer days, newsletter sign-ups, presentation requests, and public meeting attendance. Widespread public support that includes a willingness to continue funding with tax revenues.

Staffing Needs:

- District Manager
- Conservation Technician/SESC Inspector
- Communications and Administrative Coordinator
- Seasonal technicians for grant work

Budget Needs: [on annual basis]

Funding to support staff (including benefits and wage increases):

\$143,880 (year 1) - \$155,734 (year 5)

General operational funding:

\$127,275.00 (year 1) - \$72,275 (year 5)

Strategic Partnerships:

Lake to Lake (L2L) CISMA

USDA-NRCS

MDARD

EGLE

MI DNR

MSU Extension

USFS

USFWS

Upper Peninsula Resource Conservation and Development Council

Schoolcraft County Board of Commissioners

Schoolcraft County Road Commission

Schoolcraft County Environmental Education Lab

Local school districts

City of Manistique

Schoolcraft County Townships

Benchmarks, Timeline, and Actions:

Natural Resource Priority: Forestry – Management and Recreation

Goals/Measures of Success:

1. Increase level of forest management on private lands
2. On the ground results related to mast producing trees, deer wintering complexes, sustainability, and adaptation to climate change
3. Leveraging partner agencies to provide forestry services

Benchmark	Timeline	Annual Action Plan
Public outreach and education	2023-2027	Regular office hours for NRCS and FAP personnel. Conduct outreach events, workshops, volunteer days, host presentations, and field days. Raise awareness of forest health issues and best management practices. Hold tree sale, promoting native and climate favored species.
Landowner Site Visits	2023-2027	FAP and/or NRCS service providers meet with landowners free of charge to provide management recommendations, cost sharing opportunities, QFP verification, and referrals. Focus on landowner goals, climate change adaptation, and sustainability best practices.
Grants received to address forestry needs	2023-2027	Pursue grants to increase wildlife habitat, increase mast producing trees, plant trees in urban areas, and/or provide forest recreation. Examples are DHIPi grants, Wildlife Habitat grants, Urban and Community Forestry programs.

Natural Resource Priority: Water Quality

Goals/Measures of Success:

1. Mitigate/prevent erosion of shorelines
2. Locate improve degraded road stream crossings for fish and aquatic organism passage
3. Reduce and prevent AIS in waterways
4. Increase public awareness of AIS and facilitate participation in volunteer activities

Benchmark	Timeline	Annual Action Plan
Safe agriculture water use	2023-2027	Promote water testing (MAEAP) and in-farm practices that ensure clean and safe water quality for agricultural purposes; including irrigation, sprays, produce washing, wastewater discharge, and post-harvest uses
Soil Erosion and Sedimentation Control	2023-2027	Operate the SESC program for the County. Provide landowners best practices to protect and enhance natural shorelines. Participate in public meetings with relevant technical SESC information.
AIS prevention	2023-2027	Operate boat wash stations. Update AIS signage at boat landings. Interact with public on AIS best practices. Train volunteers to report AIS and monitor boat landings.
Public outreach and education	2023-2027	Host or partner with community groups to host workshops and volunteer days such as stream cleanups, healthy shorelines, rain gardens, and wetland walks. Provide technical information to county agencies on water quality issues.
Aquatic habitat restoration and stream connectivity	2023-2027	Work with partner agencies – Schoolcraft County Road Commission, USFS, MI DNR, to pursue grants to identify degraded road stream crossings and secure funding to improve them.

Natural Resource Priority: Invasive Species

Goals/Measures of Success:

1. Reduce the presence and/or spread of NNIS in Schoolcraft County
2. Increase public awareness of NNIS, in both residents and tourists alike, and promote active involvement
3. Maintain valuable active partnership with our Cisma L2L and UPRC&D

Benchmark	Timeline	Annual Action Plan
Partnership with L2L and UPRC&D	2023-2027	Attend meetings and participate in strategic planning. Leverage partnership to identify and treat sites of concern. Utilize their expertise for education and outreach.
Public outreach and education	spring through fall 2023-2027	Conduct education events and workshops focused on invasive species identification, prevention, and removal. Utilize articles, ads, billboards and other methods to communicate invasive species best management practices to the public.
Grants received to address NNIS	spring through fall 2023-2027	Pursue or facilitate grant funding to identify, treat, and restore after NNIS in Schoolcraft County; accomplished by grants received, subawards received, or support of partner agencies financially or by staff time.

Natural Resource Priority: Recycling

Goals/Measures of Success:

1. Continue scrap tire and electronics recycling efforts, and increase awareness of these programs
2. Facilitate or lead the establishment of a household recycling program in Schoolcraft County
3. Widespread public awareness and utilization of recycling programs

Benchmark	Timeline	Annual Action Plan
Continued use of scrap tire and electronics recycling	2023-2027	Continue grants for scrap tire recycling, and promote the electronics recycling program for better utilization. Increase collection rates through more intermittent collection events.
Secure grant funding	2024/25-2027	Secure sustainable long-term funding and funding needed for initial infrastructure for a household recycling program; whether through EGLE, TRP, or other sources.
Collaboration	2023-2027	Partner with Schoolcraft County, other local governmental entities, and local service providers to undertake countywide recycling, through drop off locations, curbside or a combination of both.
Outreach	2023-2027	Increase public awareness of available programs through advertising, news articles, and various social media.

Natural Resource Priority: Pollinator Habitat

Goals/Measures of Success:

1. A well maintained demonstration pollinator garden at the SCD office
2. Establish new pollinator plantings by working with private landowners and public entities
3. Sell and promote use of native plants and seeds
4. Facilitate increase in local bee keeping through outreach and NRCS support

Benchmark	Timeline	Annual Action Plan
Outreach	2023-2027	Provide educational events/workshops, articles, and social media posts - focusing on pollinator habitat, native plants, and bee keeping. Work toward helping to establish bee hives in Schoolcraft County.
Native shrub, tree, plant, and seed sales	April through September 2023-2027	Continue annual tree sale and native plant sale, with special focus on native and climate adapted species. Work to increase efficiencies within the sales.
Native habitat establishment	2023-2027	Ongoing upkeep of pollinator garden at the SCD office and utilization thereof for programs. Provide private landowners technical assistance and cost sharing options through NRCS funding to establish pollinator plantings. Seek out sites and funding sources for native plantings around Schoolcraft County.

Board Directed Priority: Agriculture and Homesteading

Goals/Measures of Success:

1. Increased enrollment in NRCS and MAEAP agricultural programs (EQIP, CSP, IRA funds)
2. Foster an active small-scale farming, gardening and homesteading community in Schoolcraft County
3. Establish an Integrated Pest Management (IPM) program in Schoolcraft County
4. Encourage cooperative agricultural activities to grow our agricultural base

Benchmark	Timeline	Annual Action Plan
Cooperation	2023-2027	Encourage growth through equipment for rent, cooperative activities related to agricultural shipping, processing, selling, and farm-to-table ventures.
Program enrollments	2023-2027	Promote NRCS services and cost sharing opportunities. Provide active support to NRCS programs and staff, and solicit and schedule site visits for related services.
Education	2023-2027	Host workshops related to home gardening, regenerative agriculture, composting, seed starting, season extending, and harvest preserving. Provide educational resources and assistance with gardening related issues/pests, promote IPM activities to agriculture community.

Board Directed Priority: Wildlife Management

Goals/Measures of Success:

1. Increase wildlife habitat through grant programs and cost sharing with landowners
2. Provide technical assistance and information through partners (FAP, NRCS) and programs

Benchmark	Timeline	Annual Action Plan
Programs	2023-2027	Promote NRCS cost sharing programs for wildlife habitat creation and expansions. Promote forest management plans through FAP program.
Grant funding	2024-2026	Obtain and execute a Wildlife Habitat grant in cooperation with other entities through Michigan DNR to expand wildlife habitat on partner lands and private participating lands in Schoolcraft County.
Public outreach and participation	2023-2027	Solicit private landowners to participate in grant programs for habitat work. Host workshops and demonstrations on creating, maintaining, or bolstering wildlife habitat. Encourage local income from non-consumptive use of wildlife (eg Warbler Wonderland).

Operations Priority: Build and Maintain Capacity

Goals/Measures of Success:

1. Retain employees and offer fair wages and benefits
2. Employees regularly use vacation time and rate job satisfaction high
3. Expand services offered and grant funded work capacity through future employees

Benchmark	Timeline	Annual Action Plan
Retain current level of staffing	2023-2027	Foster a welcoming work culture that values its employees and treats them with fairness. As funds allow, offer benefits to retain employees such as retirement contribution match and health insurance.
Hire a full time Conservation Technician	2025-2027	Craft a full time Conservation Technician position to cover SESC program needs, forestry/wildlife grant work, pollinator grant work, and other grants as pursued.

Operations Priority: Streamline Standard Operations Procedures

Goals/Measures of Success:

1. Increase profitability of programs (e.g. Tree Sale, grant work)
2. Increase capacity for programs and services

Benchmark	Timeline	Annual Action Plan
SOP manual	2024-2025	Craft SOP manual for regular District procedures including but not limited to; payroll, receivables/payables, taxes, UIA and SUW, hiring, tree sale orders and packaging.
Long term scheduling	2023-2027	Maintain a long-term schedule of upcoming events, personnel needs, and deadlines that is accessible by all employees and Directors.

Operations Priority: Foster Collaboration Between Ourselves, the County, and Existing and New Partners

Goals/Measures of Success:

1. Maintain and strengthen existing partnerships to widen our conservation significance
2. Provide better options for Director onboarding and engagement to promote collaboration

Benchmark	Timeline	Annual Action Plan
Continuing education	2023-2027	Offer scholarships to local students and educators to further their natural resource education.
Board collaboration	2024-2025	Work with MDARD and contracted service providers to provide board training and enrichment, and create a system for onboarding new Directors. Source ideas to create better dialogue between staff and Board.
Community Conservation Grants	2023-2027	Promote local conservation projects by offering Community Conservation Grants (as funding allows).
Engagement with partnerships	2023-2027	Continue to work with partner agencies and local entities on conservation projects and outreach/education. Continuously seek new groups to partner with.

Operations Priority: Increase Community Outreach and Recognition

Goals/Measures of Success:

1. Regularly hosting quality, well attended outreach events, workshops, and speakers covering a variety of natural resource topics
2. Become a trusted source for conservation information and service by the public and local officials and agencies

Benchmark	Timeline	Annual Action Plan
Outreach	2023-2027	Host at least 10 community facing events each year. Share updates via a quarterly newsletter. Maintain a public presence at community gatherings and provide meaningful connection with community members.
Partnership	2023-2027	Attendance by an SCD employee or Director at one County Board meeting each month, one township meeting each quarter - and regularly volunteer to attend other entities' planning or board meetings. Provide regular updates to local entities and offer to assist in natural resource related issues or projects.