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By Nancy Hastings

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## Conservation District reviews accomplishments at annual meeting

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HILLSDALE — The Hillsdale Conservation District received a nod of approval from the Michigan Association of Conservation Districts at its annual dinner and meeting Thursday night at the Lewis Emery Park Community Center. Angela Sandusky of Michigan Envirothon on the Michigan State University campus in Lansing said she was proud to attend the annual meeting and present the Conservationist of the Year Award to Hillsdale High School teacher Chip Patterson.

“I want to congratulate the great job this district is doing,” Sandusky said. “Accomplishments have been many and the district has turned things around in the last three years.”

After comments on the district itself, Sandusky lauded Patterson’s dedication to stewardship of the land, not only on his own 80 acres, but also with his influence on the next generation of conservation leaders in Hillsdale.

“Not only is he actively promoting conservation in his own life, Patterson and his students reached 700 people in the area last year with awareness on conservation,” Sandusky said.

Following a dinner and silent auction, Hillsdale Conservation District Administrator Jessica Luck provided an overview of the district’s accomplishments. She said the district was funded through five grants providing assistance with projects like river cleanup, technical assistance to land owners and a hunter access program.

Luck announced a tree sale of 17,000 trees last year was successful and reminded guests this year’s orders have a deadline of March 22.

District Conservationist Jason Wheeler provided highlights of 2012 in review, noting conservation plans were written for 5,306 acres of land last year. Irrigation water management was applied to 329 acres and 96 acres of grazing land was provided technical assistance.

In 2012, 15 new contracts were issued including contracts for the Conservation Stewardship Program, Agriculture Water Enhancement Program, Healthy Forest Research, and Wetland Research Program among others, with a total cost share of \$510,000.

Wheeler reported nine wetland restorations were completed last year and 110 acres of hardwood tree plantings will be completed by this spring in the copperbelly water area.

He reminded everyone that the Gas Conservation Initiative has an application deadline of Feb. 15 and those requesting more information can contact the district at 517-849-9890, ext. 3.

Soil Conservation Technician Lucas Gabbard provided an overview of best management practices and technical assistance to the educational outreach of the Maumee Watershed, among others.

“Work (on this project) amounts to saving 270 tons of soil and that’s the goal,” Gabbard said. “Because, if the soil is gone, you as farmers won’t produce.”

Gabbard reported last year, volunteers cleaned up more than 20 miles of river and agriculture education was promoted with Rural Education Days and FFA Career Day as well as Envirothon competitions on both the state and national levels.

Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP) Technician Shelby Bollwahn also reported on technical support given to 17 “diverse farms” ranging from sheep, to direct market beef to dairy and a Christmas tree farm.

Bollwahn noted 14,000 acres were MAEAP verified for a total of 32 verifications including nine farm, nine livestock and 14 crop. She presented awards to more than a dozen farms present at the meeting.

Closing out the meeting, Brian Haynes, a salesman for Cisco Farm Seed, provided a cover crops presentation by outlining a new wave of cover crops to cover the soil when the main cash crop is not growing. Challenges, cost and best choices were outlined, providing area farmers with knowledge of how and when to apply.



AP Environmental Science Teacher Chip Patterson receives the Conservationist of the Year Award Thursday night. NANCY HASTINGS PHOTO

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