



Michigan Association of Conservation Districts

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“The Future is Green”

News Release

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Chris Freiburger, MDNR FERC Supervisor, Named 2009 Friend of Conservation

Lansing, Michigan. For his outstanding contributions to the conservation of our natural resources in Michigan, the Michigan Association of Conservation Districts (MACD) recently honored Chris Freiburger, MDNR Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) Supervisor, with the 2009 Friend of Conservation Award. This award recognizes an individual, business, organization, or agency outside the association who partners with Conservation Districts to help Michigan citizens conserve their lands and Michigan natural resources.

As an FERC Supervisor, Chris works to enforce federal regulations for dam operations on Michigan's waterways. He's also responsible for removing dams. In the last 5 years, Chris has been instrumental in removing the Potagannassing, Rice Creek, City of Charlotte, Dimondale, Maple Hill, and Nashville dams, and has supported many similar projects statewide.

Natural resource education is a priority in all of his endeavors. Chris is well-known as an educator focused on reducing human impacts on water resources to improve Michigan's fisheries. State agencies, counties, organizations and MACD conventions have benefited from his presentations.

At a local level, Chris educates communities affected by stream restoration projects. Through public forums, field trips, and door-to-door visits, Chris assures that affected citizens understand the project, its purpose, and stream morphology.

“His patience and willingness to listen, coupled with his enthusiasm and his down-to-earth attitude, make him an ideal spokesperson for resource management,” commented Joanne Barnard, Executive Director of Barry Conservation District, who nominated Chris for the award, along with Andrea Stay, Executive Director of Eaton Conservation District, and Tracy Bronson, Executive Director of the Calhoun Conservation District.

“Chris knows that change is easiest when it starts from within, and that a DNR hat doesn't always inspire trust,” Joanne continued. “His work has brought him to the door of several Michigan Conservation Districts – where he has found the local relationships, resources and reputations needed to lead large-scale projects. By partnering with Conservation Districts from the onset of a project and keeping them front and center throughout the process, he shows both an understanding and respect for the role of local leadership in conservation. “

For each project, Chris helps Districts assemble partners ranging from federal agencies to local watershed councils. He meets with community leaders and groups, and works with Districts to engage and educate project stakeholders.

“Chris is always able to get people on board because he has the unique talent of making even the largest, most complicated project seem possible, even easy,” explained Joanne. “He has figured out how to bring



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together resources from every sector to make a project work, and if he can't find enough material, labor or equipment – he'll donate his own."

"More importantly, he truly cares for the quality of the natural resources with which he works. I have watched him change the most vehement naysayer into the strongest project advocate – as if by magic – by finding common ground in their shared love of the resource," said Joanne.

Chris Freiburger is truly a friend of conservation. He has built relationships with citizens and community leaders eager to show off beautiful, restored rivers or streams. "It's clear that water quality is not the only benefit that Chris's work brings," Andrea concluded. "At each place, people seem energized by their transformed landscapes. Districts and communities are enriched by new partnerships and inspired with a can-do attitude."

For his tireless efforts and for building strong community support for conservation, MACD honored Chris Freiburger with the 2009 Friend of Conservation Award at its Convention and Annual Meeting on December 17, 2009, at the Soaring Eagle Casino and Resort in Mt. Pleasant, Michigan.

Michigan Association of Conservation Districts (MACD) is a non-profit organization that represents the interests of Michigan Conservation Districts and works to strengthen Districts through leadership, information and representation at the state level.

Michigan's 79 Conservation Districts are the local providers of natural resource management services that help our citizens conserve their lands and our environment for a cleaner, healthier, economically stronger Michigan.

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Joanne Barnard, Executive Director of Barry Conservation District (left), and Andrea Stay, Executive Director of Eaton Conservation District (right) present MACD's 2009 Friend of Conservation Award to Chris Freiburger (center).
