

West Michigan Conservation Network Annual Report 2025



MISSION STATEMENT

The West Michigan Conservation Network is an effective, diverse, and sustainable partnership of environmental groups, educational institutions, governmental organizations, and private citizens working to conserve and enhance our natural communities through ecosystem restoration and public education.



Habitat and Restoration – West Michigan Cisma

During the 2025 field season, the West Michigan Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area continued manage invasive species across its 7-county service area. The three strike teams worked diligently to address a variety of invasive plants on both public and private properties. The Teams focused on several species, including Japanese knotweed, invasive bittersweet, Watch List species, and more. Additionally, the teams completed their Sustain Our Great Lakes project, performing retreatments of invasive species in the Lower Grand, Pere Marquette, and Muskegon River watersheds. The three strike teams are based out of the Kent, Muskegon, and Ottawa Conservation Districts. Additionally, Cisma staff hosted a variety of outreach events, educating the public and partners about invasive species.



The two Hemlock Woolly Adelgid (HWA) crews spent the year surveying and treating for the invasive forest pest insect across West Michigan Cisma's four lakeshore counties and in Mason County. The HWA crews are based out of the Muskegon and Ottawa Conservation Districts, and both crews have grant-covered and for-hire treatment programs. West Michigan Cisma also began work on its Landscape Scale Restoration grant from the US Forest Service after a two-year delay in grant execution. This project will involve partners from 3 CIMSAs and staff from 6 conservation districts in a large-scale effort to manage HWA in West Michigan.

2025 Cisma Accomplishments

WMCISMA STRIKE TEAMS

2,001 Acres Treated
2,661 Acres Surveyed

WMCISMA HWA CREWS

26,383 Trees Treated
1,764 Acres Treated
36,445 Trees Surveyed

EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

15 Outreach Events
652 Attendees

GRANTS

3 Grants Awarded
5 Grants Completed

West Michigan Cooperative
INVASIVE SPECIES
MANAGEMENT AREA



West Michigan Conservation Network Annual Report 2025



Learning and Engagement

To increase capacity to conserve and enhance our natural communities, WMCN held events in 2025 focused on land management. Relevant and timely for partners and the general public, programs included hands-on trainings, panel discussions, workshops, and lectures hosted across the region. Technical skill-building opportunities included a Landowner Chainsaw Safety Training covering felling, bucking, and maintenance, and a hands-on workshop on Understanding Soil Health. Capacity-building discussions included Navigating the Grant Landscape: Strategies for Success and From Parking Lot to Paradise, hosted at Calvin Ecosystem Preserve. Field-based learning was offered through a Dry Sand Prairie Tour and Invasive Control Workday at Brooks Oak Pines Sanctuary. The year concluded with the WMCN Fall Feature, Road Salt and Watershed Health: Diving into Chloride Mitigation Strategies, highlighting approaches to watershed protection and participation.



Beyond WMCN-led programs, events were also offered by individual partners, who are encouraged to share jobs and programs on the WMCN Event Calendar. In 2025, the website recorded 4,100 visits, an increase of 39%, and 9,800 page views, up 30% from the previous year. In total, 157 conservation events were listed on the calendar, expanding regional visibility and strengthening partner engagement across the network. Job opportunity postings remained a strong resource, generating 1,259 views, or an average of 105 per month. These metrics reflect growing interest in conservation work, collaboration, and professional development opportunities.



Visit our website at wmconservation.net to view and share job postings and events!

West Michigan Conservation Network Annual Report 2025



Structure and Function

On June 18, 2025, WMCN hosted its Partner and Annual Meeting at Hemlock Crossing Nature Center, welcoming 54 attendees representing 27 partner organizations, individual members, and a federal representative. Participants shared accomplishments and joined small-group discussions on restoration, invasive species, prescribed fire, trails, native plants, and watershed topics. Becky Huttenga, Justin Heslinga, and Lea Sevigny received Conservation Leadership Recognition Awards.



As of late 2025, WMCN transitioned from a nine-member Steering Committee to a fifteen-member Board of Directors to strengthen leadership, accountability, and representation for our 81 partners. This realignment clarified governance and formally approved the West Michigan Cisma to establish its own Steering Committee to guide invasive species survey, treatment, outreach, and strike-team coordination across the seven-county region, with shared representation to maintain WMCN alignment and transparency.

All partner and Board Meetings are held quarterly to advance the Strategic Plan and support subcommittee work. All are welcome to join upcoming meetings posted on the WMCN website calendar.



Subcommittee Contacts

If you would like to join a WMCN Subcommittee, please contact the committee lead!

Habitat Restoration and Management

Murielle Garbarino: Murielle.Garbarino@macd.org

Learning and Engagement

Lea Sevigny: LSevigny@gmail.com

Structure and Function

Jessie Schulte: Jessie.Schulte@kentcountymi.gov

