

MEET THE 2026 BOARD MEMBER CANDIDATES

KENT CONSERVATION DISTRICT

James DeYoung

James has served on the KCD Board since 2017, gaining extensive knowledge of the county's conservation efforts and the critical role grant funding plays in supporting local conservation work. Values collaboration with dedicated staff and volunteers and enjoys volunteering at plant sales as a way to give back to the community.

An agricultural consultant since 2005, helping farmers across the state address natural resource concerns. Develops farm-specific nutrient management plans and is actively involved in the agricultural community as a Farm Bureau member. Deeply committed to native plants, natural resource protection, and tree planting.

A resident of the City of Grand Rapids, he is deeply passionate about the community and understands that while much of the Conservation District's work focuses on rural landowners, rural and urban activities are closely connected, with impacts felt by both city and rural residents. He is proud to be part of the Kent Conservation District, a group of individuals committed to protecting natural resources, and looks forward to continuing to serve KCD for many years to come.



Karlyn "Karly" Koetje

Karly Koetje is a beef cow/calf farmer in the Lowell area who strongly believes that conservation practices are essential to the long-term sustainability of agriculture in America. Through firsthand experience on her own farm, she has seen how thoughtful land stewardship can improve pasture fertility, strengthen soil health, and enhance the natural habitat that supports both livestock and wildlife.

Karly is passionate about protecting farmland for future generations and is inspired by the work of the Kent Conservation District in advancing practical, locally driven conservation solutions. She values collaborating with the dedicated KCD staff and partners who share a common vision for healthy soils, productive farms, and a resilient agricultural landscape in Kent County.

For the past six years, Karly has been honored to serve on the KCD Board, helping guide conservation efforts that support farmers and protect natural resources across the county. She is proud of the District's impact and is eager to continue serving for another term, strengthening conservation outcomes for both agriculture and the broader community.



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Jacob Northuis

Jacob Northuis is a Wildlife Biologist with a degree in Fisheries and Wildlife Management from Lake Superior State University and nearly a decade of experience working with conservation districts and their boards.

He began his career in 2017 with the Blue Water Conservation District as a Farm Bill Biologist, where he gained hands-on experience with Farm Bill programs and landowner assistance. In 2019, Jacob joined Pheasants Forever as a Range and Wildlife Conservationist in Eastern Idaho, supporting 10 NRCS offices and seven conservation districts. His work focused on large-scale, collaborative, cross-boundary conservation projects. He was later promoted to Partner Biologist Manager, overseeing a team of Farm Bill Biologists and managing multiple federal and state agreements.

After gaining valuable professional experience out west, Jacob returned home to southwest Michigan with his fiancée, Maddie, and their two dogs, motivated by a desire to give back to the landscapes and communities that shaped him. Today, he works closely with local chapters to expand Pheasants Forever's presence across Michigan and advance conservation efforts that benefit wildlife, landowners, and future generations.



McKenna Rivers

McKenna S. Rivers brings a lifelong connection to conservation and agriculture to her service on the Kent Conservation District Board. She grew up on a farm in Southwest Michigan, spent ten years participating in 4-H, and worked summers in seed corn fields during college as a “bug scout,” experiences that fostered a deep appreciation for the land and the systems that sustain local communities. These early experiences shaped her belief that healthy soil, clean water, and strong local agriculture are essential to thriving communities.

McKenna is an attorney whose practice focuses on environmental, energy, and property law. Prior to entering the legal field, she worked as an environmental geoscientist, and her professional career has consistently centered on environmental protection and supporting Michigan communities. She holds a Bachelor of Science in Environmental Geoscience and graduated cum laude from Michigan State University College of Law. While in law school, she served as Senior Articles Editor for the Animal and Natural Resource Law Review and as Vice President of the Women's Law Caucus.

Outside of work, McKenna enjoys spending time outdoors hiking, kayaking, exploring Michigan's rivers and lakes, and visiting local farmers' markets. She is honored to bring both her professional expertise and commitment to community service to the Kent Conservation District Board.



Board member elections are being held from February 1st through March 19th, stop by our office today to vote if you are a Kent County Resident.