



# ALPENA-MONTMORENCY CONSERVATION DISTRICT

POLICY MANUAL  
2025 Revision

1900 M-32 W • Alpena, MI • 49707

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>District History and Law</b>	4
<b>Philosophy</b>	4
<b>Authority</b>	4
<b>Policy Purpose</b>	5
<b>Mission Statement</b>	5
<b>Vision Statement</b>	5
<b>Natural Resource Site Assessments</b>	5
<b>Priorities and Programs</b>	5-6
<b>Role of Science in District Activities</b>	6-7
<b>Adopting Policy</b>	8
<b>Source of Policies</b>	8
<b>Policy Accountability</b>	8
<b>Distribution of Policy Manual</b>	8
<b>Amendment or Suspension of Policy</b>	8
<b>Board Conferences, Conventions and Workshops</b>	8
<b>Board Member Ethics</b>	8-9
<b>Bonding</b>	9
<b>Conflict of Interest</b>	9-10
<b>Internal Monetary Control</b>	10-11
<b>Investment of Surplus Funds</b>	11
<b>Indemnification</b>	12
<b>Independent Auditor</b>	12
<b>Legal Counsel</b>	12
<b>Insurance</b>	12
<b>Loaning of District-Owned Equipment</b>	12
<b>District's Mailing Lists</b>	13
<b>Annual Meeting</b>	13
<b>Organizational Meeting</b>	13
<b>Oath</b>	13
<b>Election Process</b>	13
<b>Inactivation of a Board Member</b>	13
<b>Filling a Board Vacancy by Appointment</b>	13
<b>Board Member Terms</b>	13
<b>Officers</b>	13
<b>Presiding Officer</b>	14
<b>Associate Directors</b>	14
<b>Regular/Monthly Board Meeting</b>	14
<b>Consent Agenda</b>	14
<b>Special Meetings</b>	14
<b>Open Meeting</b>	14
<b>Revised Capitalization and Depreciation</b>	15
<b>Public Expression of Board Members</b>	15
<b>Local Buying</b>	16
<b>Sales Tax</b>	16
<b>Check Payment Policy</b>	16
<b>Donations and Contributions</b>	16
<b>Acquiring Property/Management Activities (Conservation Easements, etc)</b>	16-17

<b>Debit/Credit Card</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>FOIA Requests</b>	<b>17-20</b>
<b>Statement of Personnel Policy</b>	<b>20-21</b>
<b>Equal Opportunity Employment</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Nepotism</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Hiring and Rehiring</b>	<b>21-22</b>
<b>Employee Referrals</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Employee Classification</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>On-Boarding</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Probationary Period</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Work Schedule and Attendance</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Annual Work Agreement</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Office Supervision</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Employer Responsibilities</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Employee Withholding Allowance Certificate</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Promotions and Transfers</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Performance Evaluations</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Wage Scale Increases</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Time Sheets and Compensation</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Compensatory Time</b>	<b>25-26</b>
<b>Holidays and Administrative Leave</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Paid Leave</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Annual Leave</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Sick/Medical Leave</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Funeral/Bereavement Leave</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Court Leave</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA)</b>	<b>27-28</b>
<b>Military Leave</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Open Door &amp; Ethics</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Harassment</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Sexual Harassment</b>	<b>28-29</b>
<b>Drug and Alcohol Policy</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Dress Code and Personal Grooming</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Safety</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Confidential Information</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Searches of District Property</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Telephones/Faxes/E-Mails/Internet</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Travel, Lodging and Meals</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Personal Information</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Grievance Procedure</b>	<b>30-31</b>
<b>Work Rules and Disciplinary Action</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Termination of Employment</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Policy Adoption and Administration</b>	<b>32-33</b>
<b>List of Pre-Authorized Payments for 2025-26</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>Appendix B- Ungulate Policy</b>	<b>35-37</b>

# DISTRICT OPERATING POLICIES

## District History and Law

The Alpena-Montmorency Conservation District is a local unit of state government organized by the people within the District boundaries (Alpena and Montmorency Counties) under provisions of the *Soil Conservation District Law*, Act 297 of Public Act of 1937, as amended. As such, the Alpena-Montmorency Conservation District is a locally controlled resource management agency created by concerned landowners and administered by a publicly elected Board of Directors. In 1994, *The Conservation District Law* was made part of the Compiled Environmental Code. It is now part 93 of Act 451 of 1994, as amended.

According to Part 93 of Public Act 451 of 1994, a conservation district constitutes, “a governmental subdivision of this state and a public body corporate and politic, exercising public powers.” The powers of a conservation district and its board include: conduct surveys, investigations, and research relating to the conservation of farmland and natural resources; to conduct demonstrational projects related to soil erosion; to carry out preventative measures related to soil erosion; to obtain options upon and acquire property; to make available machinery, equipment and materials to landowners for the conservation of farmland and natural resources and the prevention and control of soil erosion; to take over and administer any farmland and natural resource conservation project located within its boundaries.

Michigan’s conservation districts were created to serve as stewards of our natural resources at the local level. They provide site-specific, educational information to landowners in all aspects of resource management. Since their inception, conservation districts have been involved in a variety of projects and activities that enhance and protect our land, water, forests, and wildlife by providing services to homeowners, forest landowners, farmers, wildlife enthusiasts, and educators. Each conservation district assesses the conservation programs of the district, coordinates with federal and state agencies, and prepares long range plans and annual plans to address specific conservation needs of the districts. In doing so, districts secure the necessary funding, perform needed work, and evaluate the success of each project and work to convince resource users to protect the resource, maintain its productivity, and protect or improve its profitability.

## Philosophy

Michigan’s conservation districts are “unique” subdivisions of the State, and utilize state, federal and private sector resources to solve today’s conservation problems. The guiding philosophy of all conservation districts is that local people should make informed decisions on conservation issues at the local level, with technical assistance provided by governments or other institutions.

Created to serve as stewards of natural resources, Michigan’s conservation districts take an ecosystem approach to conservation and protection. An ecosystem can be defined as a spatially explicit, relatively homogenous unit of earth that includes all interacting organisms and components of the abiotic environment. As such, conservation districts are to take a broad perspective on the overall topic of “conservation.” The vision of conservation districts is to help all citizens of their district have livable communities in harmony with the environment. They have a special role in urban and non-urban areas where land use change is taking place.

Programs carried out by conservation districts are as diverse as is the landscape in Michigan. In southern Michigan, many of the programs within districts deal with conservation needs of the farm community. In northern Michigan, there is more of an emphasis on forestry, wildlife, water quality, and recreation. Regardless, conservation districts continue to expand into diverse areas of natural resource management, such as climate change adaptation, rising to meet the environmental challenges of their local communities.

## Authority

The authority to establish policy for the governance of the Alpena-Montmorency Conservation District (hereafter, CD or District) rests solely with the Board of Directors (hereafter, Board). However, employees (such as the District Manager)

may be asked to research what other district offices and/or organizations have as policy on a given subject. Employees may also make recommendations on policy, but only the Board of Directors has the authority to adopt policy.

### **Policy Purpose:**

- Enhance efficiency and effectiveness of the District per its mission;
- Inform everyone of Board intent, goals, aspirations;
- Prevent confusion among Board members, employees and the public;
- Promote consistency and transparency of Board action;
- Eliminate the need for instant (crisis) policy making;
- Reduce criticism of the Board and management;
- Improve public relations;
- Clarify Board member and employee roles;
- Give management a clear direction from the Board.

## **OPERATIONS**

### **Mission Statement**

The Alpena-Montmorency Conservation District serves, educates and advises the people of both counties and advocates for the restoration, conservation, and preservation of natural resources.

### **Vision Statement**

The District is a partner agency tackling natural resource concerns by delivering educational, technical, financial and referral assistance to local land owners and the general public

### **Natural Resource Site Assessments**

The District shall work to provide technical support to private and public landowners for natural resource conservation, preservation, and restoration. These services shall be provided through a variety of means, including site reviews by District employees. Currently, services provided under the Forestry Assistance Program (FAP) and Michigan Agricultural Environmental Assurance (MAEAP) are funded by grants from the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (MDARD). When and where applicable, the District Manager, with Board approval, shall establish appropriate fees for site reviews and associated activities. The District Manager, in coordination with employees, shall establish site review application processes, evaluation guidelines, reporting criteria, plan development, and management criteria for Authority

### **Priorities and Programs**

The Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (MDARD) requires each of its 75 conservation districts to conduct a Conservation Needs Assessment (CNA) at least every five (5) years. A CNA is key to prioritizing resources and identifying the most important needs of county residents, helping a conservation district establish priorities and promote and implement voluntary conservation. The data from the CNA steers the District's efforts in establishing priorities, amending mission and vision statements, and shapes long-range planning. The most recent CNA (2022) established the following conservation priorities (in ranked order):

1. Invasive/Exotic Species;
2. Protecting Water;
3. Chemical/Fertilizer Use and Disposal;
4. Recycling Needs;
5. Promote and Maintain Biodiversity.

The District currently operates various programs to address emerging resource concerns and the established priorities gleaned from the CNA. The District's two technical programs address priorities while two incentive-based programs address other resource concerns. The two District programs that address priorities are the Forestry Assistance Program (FAP) and the Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP). FAP, for instance, encourages management practices that promote the maintenance of biodiversity by actions that reduce the establishment and spread of invasive species and the adverse impacts of over browsing by white-tailed deer. Other programs that address white-tailed deer are Wildlife Risk Mitigation (WRM) and Hunter Access Program (HAP). A brief description of each is below.

FAP: The mission of FAP is, "To support family forest owners in realizing the economic, social, and ecological sustainability of their forests." FAP helps citizens understand, plan, and manage their forests through various avenues of education and outreach. FAP provides an initial contact between professionals and landowners and promotes forest ecological sustainability by introducing landowners to contemporary principles of forest and wildlife ecology and management with the related goals of the landowner in mind. Promotion of native biodiversity and the reduction of invasive organisms are intricately linked into landowner education and outreach.

MAEAP is a comprehensive, proactive and voluntary environmental pollution prevention program. It takes a systems approach to assist landowners in evaluating their farms for environmental risks. The systems include Livestock; Farmstead; Cropping and Forest, Wetlands and Habitat. An environmentally assured system (A\*Syst) has been developed for each element and incentives and recognitions for those verified. MAEAP directly addresses all natural resource priorities by using voluntary practices that are based on technology and scientific research to promote environmental stewardship.

HAP is from the Michigan Dept of Natural Resources (MDNR) that is a financial opportunity for landowners willing to open their land for public hunting. The MDNR leases private lands from landowners who give licensed hunters access to their property, generally on a first-come, first-served basis. The purpose of HAP is to increase hunting opportunities, and reduce agricultural losses and disease transmission associated with white-tailed deer.

WRM. MDARD instituted WRM in 2014 to assist farmers in creating a biosecurity plan for their farms to minimize the risk of their cattle contracting bovine tuberculosis (TB). This is particularly important in Alpena and Montmorency counties, part of the Deer Management Unit (DMU) 452. DMU 452 has a higher incidence of bovine tuberculosis (TB) infection in free-ranging white-tailed deer compared to the surrounding areas.

## **Role of Science in District Activities**

As stated above, districts take an "ecosystem perspective" and the Alpena-Montmorency Conservation District assists landowners in making informed decisions with this in mind, among other things. Because the natural world, our understanding of the natural world, and our interaction with the natural world all change, however, District staff should rely on the best available science when providing education and guidance to landowners. As defined by *Science Literacy: Concepts, Contexts and Consequences* (2016): "Science is a way of knowing about the world. At once a process, a product, and an institution, science enables people to both engage in the construction of new knowledge as well as use information to achieve desired ends." When possible, staff should use access to scientific journals through US Department of Agriculture (USDA) computers and attend related scientific conferences to keep up with changes in the sciences associated with their related professions.

Three examples of how the District will apply related science to assist landowners are annual plant sales, the effects of white-tailed deer overabundance, and invasive plant management (refer to Appendix B for a more in-depth discussion and policy guidance).

*Plant Sales*: Remaining consistent with the District's mission requires a thoughtful and evidence-based approach to the selection of which plant species the District provides during its annual plant sale ("tree sale"). The introduction of non-native species in the service area is a primary driver of the District's top resource concern; Invasive/Exotic Species.

Therefore, to the maximum extent possible, the District should offer only native species (or species that are naturalized and have shown no invasive qualities) when conducting annual fundraising plant sales. Furthermore, the District should source seedlings from nurseries in the state of Michigan and utilize information sources (such as the University of Michigan herbarium) to verify origins and current distribution.

*White-tailed Deer:* Overpopulation of white-tailed deer in the District's service area presents adverse effects to native biodiversity, native ecosystems, agricultural crops, as well as presenting a hazard to drivers on roadways. The topic of white-tailed deer is a regular discussion point with District landowners, and the range of opinions on effects, management etc., are widely varied by both landowners and, at times, staff and directors. Therefore, to the maximum extent practical, the District will promote policies that provides landowners educational material and advice that is supported by the best available science to aid them in making an informed decision on their land.

*Invasive Plant Management:* As stated previously, invasive plant species are a resource concern with landowners in the service area and a top priority of the District. There are numerous management methods, each with its own application and varying levels of effectiveness. The District referred to scientific research and found that a foliar spray application with a wetlands-approved chemical to be an defensible method for the management of many woody invasive shrubs. The District created an instructional video in 2023 illustrating the method as applied to our top invasive plant; Autumn Olive. This resource for landowners is available to the public on the District's website at <https://www.alpenamontcd.org/videos.html>.

## **Adopting Policy**

All policy decisions will be made by majority vote of the Board and only at Board meetings. Before adopting any policy, all Board members will receive a copy of the proposed policy in advance of the meeting at which the vote is to be taken. The District shall utilize the “Michigan’s Conservation Districts Operations Handbook” as guiding policy for circumstances not specifically stated in this Manual.

## **Source of Policies**

Committees of the Board, individual Board members, employees, or the District Manager may recommend policies to the Board. All proposed policies will be researched to ensure that they are legal, and do not contradict already established policies of the District. If approved by the Board, policies should be written, coded, and dated at time of approval and included in all copies of the Board policy manual.

In consideration of adoption all Board policies should have “yes” answers to the following questions:

- Really necessary for good operation of the CD?
- Consistent with the District mission statement?
- Within the scope of Board authority?
- Consistent with local, state, and federal law?
- Compatible with other policies of this Board?
- Practical?
- Broad enough to cover the subject completely?
- Enforceable?

Approved policies should be added to this Manual and the Manual approved and updated accordingly.

## **Policy Accountability**

The District Manager will be accountable to the Board for policy implementation and enforcement.

## **Distribution of Policy Manual**

A copy of the District Policy Manual will remain available in the District office for review and inspection by employees and Board members. Each Board member will be given a revised policy manual. A copy may also be available on the District website?

## **Amendment or Suspension of Policy**

The Board, or a committee of the Board, or District Manager, will review all policies annually for accuracy and appropriateness. Recommendations will be made to the Board for amendment, addition or elimination. Except as otherwise provided by law, any policy of the Board may be suspended, repealed, amended, or waived by a majority vote of the Board, provided that at least two (2) full weeks advance notice have been provided of the intention to consider revocation, repeal, waiver, or amendment.

## **Board Conferences, Conventions, and Workshops**

The Board recognizes the value of membership and attendance at professional workshops and conferences and meetings at the local, County, State, and National levels. Attendance at local, County, State, and/or National workshops and conferences is encouraged. Each Board member or District employee is expected to report back to the Board after attending a conference or meeting at District expense.

## **Board Member Ethics**

Board members will strive to improve conservation practices of all communities and, to that end, they will:

1. Attend all regularly scheduled Board meetings to the maximum extent as possible and become informed concerning the issues to be considered at those meetings.

2. Recognize that they should endeavor to make policy decisions only after full discussion at publicly held Board meetings.
3. Adhere to a consistent and efficient chain-of-command; all employees report to the District Manager and the District Manager reports to the Board of Directors.
4. Render all decisions based on the available facts, related scientific literature review, and independent judgment and refuse to surrender that judgment to individuals or special interest groups.
5. Encourage free expression of opinion by all Board members, and seek systematic communications between the Board, employees, and all elements of the community.
6. Work with the other Board members to establish effective Board policies and to delegate appropriate authority to the District Manager for the daily administration of the District.
7. Work with the District Manager to promote a culture of science.
8. Communicate to other Board members and the District Manager expressions of public reaction to Board policies and district programs.
9. Inform themselves about current issues by individual study and through participation in programs providing needed information, such as those sponsored by the State and the Michigan Association of Conservation Districts (MACD).
10. Support the employment of people objectively best qualified to serve as District employees and insist on a regular and impartial evaluation of all employees.
11. Avoid being placed in a position of conflict of interest, and refrain from using their Board positions for personal partisan gain.
12. Take no private action that will compromise the Board or administration and respect the confidentiality of information that is privileged under applicable law.
13. Remember always that their first and greatest concern must be for the wise use and protection of the District's natural resources.

The District formally denounces racism and discrimination in any form. We are committed to gain greater awareness and understanding of issues important to our diverse community. We condemn all acts of violence, xenophobia, racism, and bigotry. Everyone should be able to pursue their life goals without fear of being targeted. We support actions to advance diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) in natural resource conservation.

The District strives to be a welcoming and inclusive place for individuals of all backgrounds and identities. We are committed to live each day by principles of community – *respect, purpose, cooperation, richness of diversity, freedom from discrimination, and honest and respectful expression of ideas.*

## **Bonding**

The Board recognizes that prudent trusteeship of the resources of this District. Moreover, State law dictates that employees responsible for the safekeeping of District monies be bonded. The District shall be indemnified against loss of money by bonding of employees holding the position, and in the amounts, determined by the Board and in accordance with state law. All other employees handling money shall be covered under a blanket bond to an amount determined by the Board. The Board shall bear the cost of bonding each employee required to be bonded by this policy.

## **Conflict of Interest**

The maintenance of unusually high standards of honesty, integrity, impartiality, and professional conduct by Board members and District employees are essential to ensure the proper performance of District business as well as to earn and keep public confidence in the District.

To accomplish this, the Board has adopted the following guidelines to assure that conflicts of interest do not occur. These are not intended to be all-inclusive, or to substitute for good judgment on the part of all Board members or District employees.

1. No Board member or District employee shall engage in, or have a financial interest, directly or indirectly, in any activity that conflicts or raises a reasonable question of conflict with his/her duties and responsibilities in the District.
2. No Board member or District employee shall use his/her position to benefit either himself/herself or any other individual or agency apart from the total interest of the District.
3. All activities involving financial interests, such as the hiring of new staff or the allocation of funds, must include transparency of relationships between and Board member (or staff member) and the party to benefit from said action.
4. No Board member or District employee shall engage in business, private practice of their profession, the rendering of services, or the sale of goods of any type where advantage is taken of any professional relationship they have with any client in the course of their employment with the District. This includes, but is in no way limited to, the following:
  - a. The provision of any private services for a fee.
  - b. The use, sale, or improper divulging of any privileged information about a client gained during their District duties or through his/her access to District records.
  - c. The referral of any client for services to any private business or professional practitioner if there is any expectation of reciprocal referrals, sharing of fee, or other remuneration for such referrals.
  - d. The requirement of clients to purchase any private goods or services provided by an employee or any business or professional practitioner with whom any employee has a financial relationship, as a condition of receiving any approvals or recommendations.

Exceptions to policy necessary to provide mandatory services to District clients will be disclosed to the Board before entering into any relationship.

## **Internal Monetary Control**

In order to provide reasonable assurance that assets of the District are safeguarded against unauthorized use and disposition, and to bring our District into compliance with the Michigan Conservation District Uniform Accounting Procedures Manual, the following system of internal controls over the accounting procedures is established.

### *Receipts:*

1. ALL revenue must be receipted numerically with a three-part receipt or QuickBooks receipt.
2. Each receipt must clearly indicate the name of the payer, the amount paid, the purpose of the payment, indicate the form of payment (cash, check, money order), and initials of employees.
3. When a check is received, it must immediately be stamped “for deposit only.”
4. ALL copies of voided or cancelled receipts must be marked VOID and retained in the book.
5. All receipt books must be accounted for numerically.
6. Whenever possible collections must be reconciled by an individual not involved in the process.

### *Deposits:*

1. Deposits must be made at least monthly, and more frequently if warranted.
2. Each deposit must be accompanied by a QuickBooks deposit summary.
3. The Deposit Summary must be reviewed by a qualified and bonded district employee or a designated Board member prior to funds being deposited in the Conservation District bank account(s). This person is to make sure that the bank deposits are made intact.
4. Bank deposit slips must be attached to the corresponding summary and associated receipts.
5. Deposit summary documents must be kept and be maintained in order by date of deposit.

#### *Bank Accounts:*

1. All District bank account registrations (documents at the bank) must include the name of the District, the name of the account, and the name of the Board Treasurer.
2. Bank signature cards should be kept current and the authorized signers limited to three (3).
3. All District bank accounts will have an ending date of the last day of each month.
4. Except where specifically provided by statute, it is not proper to operate a District bank account without Board approval. The Board may NOT designate other District officials such as a committee or commission to operate other activities and permit such committee or commission to open its own bank account, deposit its own collections, and pay its own bills or charges. The District Manager and Board Treasurer must receive and deposit all District revenue. The District Manager and Board Treasurer must pay out the money upon proper order by the Board.
5. All bank accounts must be reconciled to the District accounting records monthly. The District Manager's records must agree with or reconcile to the Board treasurer's and the bank's records. A reconciliation sheet should be prepared and kept on file in the district office.
6. At a minimum, the Board Treasurer should review the reconciliation done by the District Manager and signify agreement with signature and date.

#### *Imprest Cash:*

1. An imprest (petty) cash account in the amount of \$250.00 is authorized by the Board.
2. This account is to be used for a change fund and for the payment of small incidental expenditures not to exceed \$50.00.
3. Disbursements require appropriate documentation.
4. This account is to be justified monthly if funds have been used. Disbursements are to be charged to the appropriate expense accounts when a replenishment check is written.

#### *Cashing or Accepting Checks*

1. The District will not cash payroll or personal checks.
2. Any personal check accepted must be made payable to Alpena-Montmorency Conservation District (AMCD) and must be in the exact amount of the charge being paid.

#### *Disbursements:*

1. Numerically controlled, pre-numbered checks must be used.
2. Double signatures are required. One signature MUST be a Board member designated by the Board to perform this duty.
3. Signature stamps will NOT be used on checks.
4. Appropriate documentation must be attached to the check stub.
5. Check stubs must be filed in order by check number.
6. All payments must be approved by the Board monthly.
7. Adequate security must be provided over unused checks.

#### *Pre-Authorized Payments: See Appendix A*

1. The Board may authorize a list of payments which can be made prior to full Board approval to avoid delinquency or late charges and payroll at the currently approved rate per hour (including mileage and related payroll taxes and withholdings).
2. This list will be reviewed, updated, and approved annually.

## **Investment of Surplus Funds**

District funds will be invested in accordance with Act 20 PA 1943, as amended. It is the policy of the District to invest its funds in a manner which will provide the highest investment return with the maximum security, while meeting the daily cash flow needs of the District for all financial assets. Should the District accumulate a balance greater than \$50,000 in the

District's general checking account the District Manager will transfer excess funds to one of the designated investments for surplus funds. The District reserves the right to keep an excess of \$50,000 in the general checking account to ensure adequate liquidity of funds for known upcoming expenses. All investments will be handled by the District Manager with Board approval.

## **Indemnification**

The Board may hold harmless, indemnify, pay, settle, or comprise a judgment against a Board member to the extent allowed under law.

## **Independent Auditor**

The District shall have an independent "GAAS" audit every year ending in an even number (e.g., 2024, 2026, etc.) and undergo an independent review for every year ending in an odd number (e.g., 2025, 2027, etc.). The District shall supply MDARD with an audit report prior to the end of the following fiscal year. The independent audit shall:

1. Examine the balance sheet of the District at the close of its fiscal year and the related statements of transactions in the various funds for the fiscal year then ended.
2. Conduct such examination in accordance with generally accepted auditing standards, and to include such tests of the accounting records and such other auditing procedures as are necessary in the circumstances.
3. Render an opinion of the financial statements prepared at the close of the fiscal year.
4. Make recommendations to the Board concerning its accounting records, procedures, and related activities as may appear necessary or desirable.
5. Perform such other related services as may be required by law or requested by the Board.

## **Legal Counsel**

The Board may employ an attorney, or utilize the services of MACD's legal counsel, to represent the District or Board in actions brought for or against the District and to render other legal services for the welfare of the District.

## **Insurance**

The Board shall purchase with District funds the type and amount of insurance necessary to protect the District and employees from major financial losses. Insurance purchased shall include, but need not be limited to, the following:

- a. Negligent acts, or omissions which cause personal injury or wrongful death.
- b. Fire and extended coverage on District office contents.
- c. Comprehensive bodily injury, property damage on automobiles.
- d. Special coverage for equipment not ordinarily covered under a standard policy.
- e. Employee insurance coverage as specified in the employee work agreements or by Board action.
- f. Worker's compensation coverage.
- g. Legal liability for Board members and employees.

Insurance for a given coverage shall be obtained at the lowest possible cost, assuming that service and company reliability are satisfactory. The District Manager shall administer the insurance.

## **Loaning of District-Owned Equipment**

The Board believes that District-owned equipment is a valuable resource, and may be loaned or rented for community use under certain conditions only. Any loans shall not infringe on the original and necessary purpose of the equipment or interfere with the mission of the District. The Board may lend specific items of equipment upon request of the user and approval granted by the District Manager. The user of District-owned equipment shall be fully liable for any damage or loss occurring to the equipment during the period of its use and shall be responsible for its safe return. All equipment and materials will be loaned out on an as-available basis. Directors and District employees will have the highest priority. All borrowers will be required to sign out materials from the lending library folder and sign a consent agreement.

## **District's Mailing Lists**

The District will not provide its mailing list to any outside entity or individual. All lists are used internally by District employees and the Board for program promotion and District updates.

## **Annual Meeting**

The Board shall organize an Annual Meeting following each fiscal year with the date to be determined by the Board; under Public Act 107. The meeting must be held prior to the end of next fiscal year (e.g., Annual meeting for 2024 held prior to end of fiscal year 2025).

## **Organizational Meeting**

The Board shall hold an organizational meeting each year there is an election. The organizational meeting shall be the monthly Board Meeting immediately after the Annual Meeting and Elections. At the organizational meeting, the District shall:

1. Elect Officers of the Board of Directors.
2. Designate authorized signers on bank accounts.
3. Designate a day, place, and time for regular monthly meetings.

## **Oath**

Each elected Board member shall file an acceptance of office as well as an affidavit of eligibility and shall take an oath of office. The oath of office must be administered by and signed by a notary of the public.

## **Election Process**

Members of the Board shall be elected annually as terms expire at the District's designated Annual Meeting following the close of the designated fiscal year in a manner that is consistent with State law.

When considering nominees for Board of Director positions, the Board should make every effort to ensure that both counties in the District's service area are represented.

The Board may also appoint Associate Board Members to facilitate the development and involvement of these individuals in the Board. Associate Board Members are not legally elected members and as such may not vote or serve in any official act or function of an elected Board Member.

## **Inactivation of a Board Member**

The Board is an elected position with certain responsibilities. Due to the nature of the Board, it is imperative that every effort be made by its members to attend all meetings. Those members of the Board that miss more than 3 (three) meetings in a row or miss a total of 4 (four) meetings throughout the fiscal year, will be assumed to be inactive. An inactive Board Member may be asked to resign from the Board or his/her position may be considered vacated and the Board will inform MDARD of such with a request to replace the Board Member by an appointment of another individual.

## **Filling a Board Vacancy by Appointment**

The Board shall use the following procedure to appoint a person to fill a vacancy on the Board:

1. The Board shall seek qualified and interested candidates from the community through the news media, word of mouth, or contacts with appropriate organizations.
2. All applicants will submit interest to the Board at the District's board meeting.
3. The Board shall interview all interested candidates to ascertain their qualifications.
4. Appointment by the Board to fill a vacancy shall be by majority vote of the full Board.

## **Board Member Terms**

The term of each Board member shall commence on the first scheduled Board meeting the Board member is elected or appointed. Each member shall serve a four (4) year term and shall continue until a successor is elected and qualified, a vacancy occurs, or until the individual resigns.

## **Officers**

The Board shall elect a Chair, Vice-Chair, Secretary, and Treasurer. The Secretary and Treasurer positions may be filled by a single Board member. Election of officers shall be by majority vote of a quorum. Where no such majority exists on the first vote, a second vote shall be cast for the two (2) candidates who received the greatest number of votes. Except for those appointed to fill a vacancy, officers shall serve for the extent of their elections term. An officer may be removed for cause by a majority vote of the full Board. The Board shall fill a vacancy in any office within thirty (30) days of the occurrence of the vacancy.

## **Presiding Officer**

The Chair shall preside at all meetings of the Board. In the Chair's absence, disability, or disqualification, the Vice-Chair shall preside; if neither person is available, then the Secretary shall preside.

## **Associate Directors**

Associate Directors are an important part of the Conservation District's Board of Directors team. Associate Directors have all the privileges of being a director except they cannot make or vote on motions. Associate Directors should be selected to bring a wide variety of knowledge and skills to the group. Associate Directors can be very important in the formation of sub-committees as they don't count against the restricted number of Board members. They can also be groomed to be future Board Directors as they gain knowledge of the district. Associate Directors will be appointed by the Board of Directors based on a majority vote.

## **Regular / Monthly Board Meeting**

The Board shall hold a meeting once each month on a date and at a time and place determined annually by a resolution of the Board. Within ten (10) days after the organizational Board Meeting, the District Manager shall post a notice at the District office, and in other locations considered appropriate by the District Manager, listing the date, time, and place of each regularly scheduled meeting of the Board. The notice shall contain the name and address of the District and its telephone number. The notice shall also contain the following statement: *"Upon request to the District Manager, the District shall make reasonable accommodation for a person with disabilities to be able to participate in this meeting."*

Any meeting of the Board may be recessed to another time and place that is available to the general public. Any meeting which is recessed for more than thirty-six (36) hours shall be reconvened only after notice stating the date, time, and place of the recessed meeting, as well as the name, address, and telephone number of the District has been posted on or near the front door of the District office and such other place(s) as the Board may determine for at least eighteen (18) hours prior to the time the meeting is to be reconvened.

## **Consent Agenda**

The Board may use a consent agenda to keep routine matters within a reasonable time frame and may include routine business items such as minutes of prior meeting, financial reports, bills for payment, and employee reports. A closed session option will be included in the consent agenda for situations that require the Board to address authorized matters and a two-thirds vote is required by the Board. Upon coming out of closed session, a vote by the board will be taken in public and the results added to the meeting minutes.

## **Special Meetings**

Notice of any special meetings must state the date, time, place and the business to be transacted. The District Manager will post the notice of any special meeting at least eighteen (18) hours before said special meeting at the District office. The District Manager will provide a copy of said notice to each Board member. Special meetings of the Board may be called by the Chair or by any two (2) members of the Board provided there is compliance with the notice provision of this policy. Emergency Meetings are not allowed, as notice must be given per the Open Meetings Act.

## Open Meeting

The District will abide by all rules and regulations as set forth in the Michigan Open Meetings Act (PA 267, 1976). Directors may attend meetings virtually but may not vote on agenda items as stated in the OMA. The District Manager will keep minutes of each meeting showing the date, time, place, members present, members absent, any decisions made at a meeting open to the public, and the purpose or purposes for which a closed session is called. These minutes must be approved by the Board and endorsed by the District Manager at the next meeting. The minutes shall include all votes taken at the meeting. Proposed minutes shall be available for public inspection following the approval at proceeding meeting. The official minutes shall be kept indefinitely and filed in the District office.

The Board recognizes the value of public comment on natural resource issues and the importance of allowing members of the public to express themselves on District matters and is required to comply with OMA. Any person or group wishing to place an item on the agenda shall register their intent with the District Manager at least seven days prior to the meeting with all details of the topic to be addressed. All other participation is permitted during the public comment period and regulated by the presiding officer.

## Revised Capitalization and Depreciation

The following policy shall govern fixed assets and how those assets are capitalized and depreciated. For this document, the term “fixed asset” will refer to land, buildings, equipment, and improvements acquired by the District. Items over \$1,000 will be capitalized. Fixed assets that meet or go beyond this threshold will be recorded in the general ledger along with recorded depreciation. Fixed assets that fall under the threshold will be recorded as an expense in that fiscal year in which it was acquired. Additions that are capitalized should include any freight and installation costs. Maintenance expenditures that increase the longevity of the asset by one year or more should be capitalized, otherwise they should be expensed. Donated fixed items should be tracked but are not additions on the face of the balance sheet nor are they depreciated.

***Method of Depreciation: Depreciation of capital assets will be recorded in the District general ledger and will be depreciated on a straight-line basis as follows:***

- Computers and office equipment.....3 years
- Office furniture and fixtures.....7 years
- Major equipment (e.g., vehicles, tractor, planter, etc).....7 years
- Leasehold improvements
  - To rental properties..... Leased years remaining
  - To owned buildings..... 39 years
- Land..... Tracked as memo entry with acquisition date and cost

The District Manager is responsible for keeping and maintaining a written inventory of the fixed assets held by the District, using a spreadsheet to indicate each item. The donated fixed assets should also be tracked on this spreadsheet, separately from the purchased items.

Shortly after the end of the fiscal year, the District Manager should work with the outside, independent accountant to assure inventory is accurately aligned with the inventory ledger. This would include taking a physical inventory of fixed assets and adjusting for any additions and dispositions, including scrapped, recycled, donated, stolen, or sold items during the fiscal year. When practicable, assets will be tagged with metal tags or otherwise labeled with appropriate identification. Items will be adequately safeguarded against theft and damage.

## Public Expression of Board Members

The Chair shall function as the official spokesperson for the Board. All other Board members may make public statements on District matters to local media, local officials, and/or State officials. If a position has not been sanctioned by a majority of members, Board members will, when writing or speaking on District matters to the media, legislators, and other officials, make it clear that their views do not necessarily reflect the views of the Board or of their colleagues on the Board.

## **Local Buying**

The District desires to purchase from local vendors whenever possible. The District Manager ensures this by researching all large purchases before buying. With District Manager approval, employees are authorized to make a purchase using personal funds and request reimbursement when incidental purchases are needed on behalf of the District but may not have District funds immediately available to do so. Employees will plan for purchases on both a short-term and long-term basis. Employees will minimize small orders and last-minute purchases, and purchase goods and services in larger quantities to maximize discounts.

## **Sales Tax**

The District is exempt from paying all local and State sales taxes or Federal excise taxes. The District Manager will provide the necessary exemption documents to any vendor upon request.

## **Check Payment Policy**

The District will accept all business and personal checks with appropriate information (name, address, phone number, date of issue, signature / stamp). Checks that are returned due to insufficient funds will be charged a \$25 servicing fee. All purchases / invoices associated with a returned check are subject to additional finance charges as applicable.

## **Donations and Contributions**

The District desires to provide financial support/donations to worthwhile activities and organizations in the community. All requests for contributions are to be referred to the District Manager for reviewing, evaluating, and approving or recommending approval or disapproval from the Board of each request.

## **Acquiring Property/Management Activities (Conservation Easements etc.)**

The District shall have full authority to obtain properties or enter into easement agreements, hold easements, or receive transferred properties or easements from other organizations. However, before obtaining a property or easement, a structured decision-making process must be undertaken by the Board, District Manager, and other District employees during which the specific use of the property relative to the District's mission, will be discussed along with other appropriate topics (e.g., financial obligations, planning and management needs and responsibilities, use of funds generated from activities, boundary marking, allowable uses, roles and responsibilities of all staff, etc.).

The primary purpose of property ownership and/or the holding of easements is to promote novel management techniques within the educational aspect of the District's mission and not recreation or other activities clearly outside of the District's mission. For all easements or properties that are donated to the District or purchased by the District, the District Manager may have full authority and signatory right to act on behalf of the District.

The following are attributes to be considered by decision makers prior to pursuing a property:

1. Parcel size is important; 40 acres or more is desirable;
2. Vehicular access of high quality (2-wheel drive with clearance);
3. Clear title/no other associated owners;
4. Distance from human communities (greater distances correlate with less illegal dumping, etc.);
5. Little, if any, recreational and no motorized use;
6. Primarily native vegetation is desirable;
7. No dumps, toxic sites, major erosion issues.

## Steps Once Property Found/Acquired:

1. Establish a management plan with specific goals, objectives, use, maintenance etc.;
2. Mark all property boundaries and establish outreach materials;
3. Consider enrolling property in Hunting Access Program.

## Other Considerations:

1. Taxes
2. Income received from the property via timber sales should go directly into account to manage the property
3. Policies need to be developed re: conflicts of interests of Board and Staff.

## Debit/Credit Card

Only a debit card shall be issued in the name of the District from the primary bank account. No employees, other than the District Manager, will be issued a card. Use of the debit card by any employee other than the District Manager is prohibited without the express consent of the District Manager. The card may only be used for District business transactions that have been approved within the budget or by prior approval of the Board for items over \$250. All purchases made by usage of the debit card will be shown on the monthly financial statements in the same manner as checks. District employees who use the debit card shall, as soon as possible, submit a copy of the vendor's card slip to the District Manager. If no card slip was obtained, the employee shall submit a signed voucher that shows the name of the vendor or entity from which goods or services were purchased, the date, and the amount of the transaction. An employee who uses the debit card is responsible for its protection and custody. If the card is lost or stolen, the District Manager shall be notified immediately to cancel the card with the issuing authority. Employees who use a District card in a manner contrary to this policy shall be subject to any or all the following disciplinary actions, as deemed appropriate: verbal counseling, written reprimand, reimbursement to the District for unauthorized expenditures, suspension, and/or termination.

## FOIA Requests

District will ensure that all persons are granted full and complete information regarding the affairs of the District as provided by the Michigan Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), Public Act 442 of 1976.

In accordance with FOIA (MCLA 15.236), the District Board has designated the District Administrator as the FOIA Coordinator who is responsible for accepting and processing FOIA requests and approving any denials of such requests.

### Procedures

#### *Submitting Requests*

Michigan Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests are to be made in writing. Requests may be submitted in person, through mail, fax, or email. A request form is attached to this policy. Forms received by electronic submission (fax, email) are considered received one business day after the electronic transmission is made. If the request is submitted by email and the email request is held or quarantined in the District's spam or junk folder, the request shall be deemed received one business day after the District first became aware of the request.

#### *Processing Requests*

All staff must promptly forward FOIA requests to the FOIA Coordinator upon receipt. The FOIA Coordinator shall maintain a log of all written requests received, showing the nature and date of the request, determination of disposition, date of disposition and manner of final response to the FOIA request. The FOIA Coordinator shall provide one of the following responses within five (5) business days after the request has been made unless a single extension of not more than ten (10) business days has been issued.

Grant the Request: Make the records available to the requestor.

Deny the Request: Submit a written notice denying the request, stating the reasons for denial, including an explanation of the requestor's right to seek an appeal of the FOIA Coordinator's decision to the District's Board. Denial may be made because, among other reasons, the record does not exist, it cannot be sufficiently identified from the description contained in the request, or the record is exempt from disclosure.

Grant the Request in Part and Deny the Request in Part: Grant the request in part and issuing a written notice to the requestor denying the request in part.

Extension: The FOIA Coordinator may issue a notice extending the response period to no more than ten (10) business days. Only one extension is allowed per request.

### **Fees**

The FOIA permits the District to charge the requestor a fee for labor costs, copies, mailing and other costs associated with responding to the request for public records. If it takes less than fifteen (15) minutes or less than ten (10) copies to respond to the FOIA request, there shall be no fee. For any requests requiring more than fifteen minutes of staff time or more than ten copies, the following fees are as follows:

Labor cost to search, locate, examine, separate and duplicate records: The District will calculate labor costs using the hourly wage of the District's lowest paid employee capable of performing the required task, whether or not they are available or actually perform the labor. Such labor costs shall be estimated and charged in fifteen (15) minute increments. The hourly wage will be based on the District's payroll records for the applicable fiscal year. Labor costs shall also include up to 50% of the hourly wage to partially cover the costs of fringe benefits, not to exceed the actual costs of the benefits.

Services performed by an outside contractor or legal counsel: In the event that the District uses a contract or outside labor to separate and redact exempt material from non-exempt material, it will identify the name of the person or firm who does the work. In such circumstances, the total labor cost charged will not exceed an amount six (6) times the minimum hourly wage in the State of Michigan.

Copying charges: Duplication of public records and documents shall be charged at the rate of \$0.10 per page.

Mailing: The District will charge the actual cost of postage or express service, if requested.

Material Cost: If electronic files are requested and provided, the actual costs of items like CDs, DVDs, flash drives, or other electronic media materials needed to fulfill a request will be charged.

If there is no fee for the request, the record will be sent to the requestor when complete, according to the timelines stated above. If the fee is anticipated to be less than \$50.00, the requestor will be notified that the record will be available in accord with the timelines above, and once the applicable payment is received. If the fee is anticipated to be more than \$50.00, the requestor will be notified that the request will be processed once a deposit equal to 50% of the anticipated fee is received.

If a person submits an affidavit of indigence, stating they are receiving public assistance or sufficiently states facts showing an inability to pay the applicable fee because of indigency, the first \$20.00 of the fee shall be waived.

### **Exemptions to FOIA Requests**

The FOIA Coordinator may exempt from disclosure any records identified as exempt from disclosure in Section 13 of the FOIA:

- a. That portion of any public record disclosing a person's social security number.
- b. Information protected under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974.
- c. Minutes of any closed session meeting, disclosure of which is prohibited by the Open Meetings Act.

d. Any other public record, information or material, the disclosure of which is prohibited by law.

**Appeal of Denial**

If a person’s request for a public record is denied, in whole or in part, the person may file a written appeal. The appeal shall state the word “appeal” and identify the reason or reasons for the reversal of the denial. The FOIA Coordinator will submit the appeal to the District Board who may reverse or uphold the initial decision, or a combination thereof.

**Record Retention**

The FOIA Coordinator shall maintain all FOIA requests on file for a minimum of one (1) year.

**FOIA Request Form – Alpena-Montmorency Conservation District**

Name:	Date:
Address:	
Email:	Phone:
Information Requested:	
Photocopies or Electronic files?	

**For Staff Use Only**

Request Received by:		Estimated Cost:		Date:	
Deposit: \$ _____		Payment Method: _____		Receipt # _____	
Date Information Provided:			Format:		
<b>Labor</b>					
# of Hours:		Hourly Rate:		Total for Labor:	\$ _____
<b>Photocopies</b>					
# of Copies:		Cost per Copy:		Total for Copies:	\$ _____
<b>Mileage</b>					

# of Miles:		Cost per Mile:		Total for Mileage:	\$ _____
Other:					\$ _____
				Postage:	\$ _____
				Total:	\$ _____
				Less Deposit:	\$ _____
				Balance Due:	\$ _____

## DISTRICT PERSONNEL POLICIES

### Introduction

The District reviews its policies, procedures and benefits and makes revisions, modifications and changes thereto based on the need for, and desirability of, such changes annually or as needed. Thus, any policy procedure or benefit outlined here may be modified, increased, or decreased at any time. This handbook is intended to help employees become better acquainted with the District, its policies, and rules as well as benefits and privileges and should be kept for future reference. This is not an employment contract, nor does it guarantee employment for any determined amount of time. Employees have been “Employed at Will” unless otherwise noted.

### Statement of Policy

A tremendous part of the success of the District is dependent upon its most important asset - its employees. It is the District’s goal to provide a relationship of mutual trust and respect among all parties. The goal is that such an environment will allow employees to attain personal satisfaction from their work and contribute to the District’s mission. The maintenance of unusually high standards of honesty, integrity, impartiality, and conduct by the District staff is essential to assure the maintenance of confidence by citizens in Alpena and Montmorency Counties.

The confidence of citizens in the service area is heavily influenced not only by the programs provided, but by the way the District administers them. The avoidance of misconduct and conflicts of interest on the part of the District employees through informed judgment is indispensable to the maintenance of professionalism. So too is the following of established chain-of-command structure that proceeds from employee to the District Manager to the Board. In accordance with these concepts, this personnel policy sets forth the rules and regulations for employees of the District, prescribing standards of conduct and responsibilities and governing the reporting of employment and financial interests.

The District will make every effort to treat each employee fairly and with integrity, and shall reward successes and communicate where improvements must be made. Nonetheless, employees sometime leave because of family considerations, changing career goals, or some other reason that are personal in nature. Likewise, the District retains the right to enlarge, reduce, make changes in, or terminate work agreements with the staff. Employment with the District is therefore considered "at will", permitting either party to end the employment relationship at their discretion without cause.

*t will be the policy of the District:*

- To promote transparency and comply with *Open Meetings Act* in all endeavors of hiring, rehiring or disciplinary actions.
- To transparently acknowledge all relationships between parties working with or for the District and those obtaining financial or other benefits from the District.
- To select and hire the best qualified individual without regard to race, creed, color, age, sex, national origin, religion, or handicap and to be fair in the administration of our policies and practices.
- To provide wages and benefits that are competitive with those provided for similar positions in the local area and to regularly review them to ensure our programs are competitive.
  
- To provide job security by improving the District's position to minimize adverse effects on our employees while maintaining the stability of the District.
- To provide safe working conditions by maintaining an orderly operation, developing, and adhering to policies and practices that ensure the safety and health of our employees.
- To encourage an individual's self-development by providing, or promoting educational programs, training and other opportunities for skill development and advancement.
- To recognize length of service as a factor in cases of promotion, layoff, and recall, other qualifications being equal.
- To keep employees informed of developments within the District (i.e., hold regular staff meetings).
- To encourage open discussion of all ideas, suggestions, problems, and matters of concern among employees and supervisors. Differences of opinion, complaints, and problems will naturally occur and direct and honest constructive criticism and debate are to be encouraged.

## **Equal Opportunity Employment**

Equal opportunity is, and shall be provided for all employees and applicants for employment based on their demonstrated ability and competence without discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, status as a veteran, or disability.

It is further recognized that to attract and retain such persons, the District must maintain a competitive posture with regard to compensation of its employees, including fringe benefits, and must maintain operating policies and procedures which treat every employee with fair and equal consideration. For purposes of promotions, demotions, layoffs, recalls from layoffs, transfers and filling temporary openings, the employee's qualifications, including ability to perform the work and service, are to be considered without regard to race, color, religion, sex, disability, national origin, or status as a veteran.

Employment and promotional opportunities shall be advertised in such a manner that the public is assured an open opportunity to apply and to be properly considered for District employment, and so that present District employees may be knowledgeable of possible chances for advancement.

## **Nepotism**

Hiring immediate family members of District Board Members, employees, or United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) personnel assisting the District will be avoided to the maximum extent possible. "Immediate family" shall mean: children, spouse, siblings, siblings of spouse, parents, parents of spouse, grandparents and grandparents of spouse. The Board may grant exception in the case of a temporary position.

The District shall abide by all Federal and State child labor laws.

## **Hiring and Rehiring**

Job applicants and former employees who are being considered for hire or rehire must complete the following before employment can commence; please note that rehires have the same status as new hires, no credit is given for previous employment:

1. Be interviewed and recommended for employment.

2. Completion of all applicable data and benefit records.
3. Be instructed in all work rules, safety rules, and other rules applicable to the job and operation.
4. Possess a valid, current driver license, produce current auto insurance, and have the ability to pass a background check (USDA requirement to work in a Federal building).

Notice of all Board-approved permanent positions, which are vacated or newly created, will be posted by the District in the office or on other media platforms for a minimum of one week.

## Employee Referrals

The District accepts and encourages referral of qualified applicants for employment by present District employees. All applicants are considered based on their qualifications for the job and in accordance with our policy on non-discrimination and equal employment opportunity.

## Employee Classification

1. Regular Full Time – Employees who work in a position authorized by the District Board and work from week to week throughout the year for an average of at least 40 hours per week. Regular full-time employees shall be eligible for fringe benefits as detailed in this policy. Hourly and salaried employees are eligible for compensatory time for hours worked over 40 hours per week.
2. Regular Part Time – Employees who work for the District on a continuous, regular basis less than 40 hours per week in a position authorized by the District Board. Part-time employees shall be eligible, on a pro-rated basis for vacation, sick leave, and holiday pay.
3. Grant Employee (Regular, full-time salaried position) – Employees who are hired pursuant to State, Federal, or local grants programs, and whose continued employment is subject to continued funding of that grant (s). Grant employees shall be eligible for the same benefits as full-time salaried employees, provided the grant provides for reimbursement of these fringe benefits.
4. Temporary Full Time – Employees who work for the District as short-term replacements (less than 180 days) for full-time or part-time employees or who are hired on an irregular basis for special employment periods, with District approval. Temporary employees shall not be eligible for any fringe benefits except on a case by case basis.
5. Seasonal - Employees who work or may work from year to year but do not work each week throughout the year and were hired to do seasonal work. Seasonal employees shall not be eligible for any fringe benefits except on a case by case basis.

## On-Boarding

The district manager is responsible for properly on-boarding new employees. On-boarding includes, at minimum, orientation to office and other staff, equipment, operating locations and providing the following documents:

- Employee Withholding Allowance Certificate (Federal/MI Form W-4);
- Michigan New Hire Form;
- Employment Eligibility Verification (Form I-9);
- Applicable USDA security background investigation forms (NRCS);
- Conservation District Law;
- Conservation District Operations Manual;
- Alpena-Montmorency Conservation District Policy Manual;
- Current Conservation Needs Assessment (results and established priorities);
- AMCD Annual Report;
- Copy of the grant the employee will be working under (when applicable);
- Annual Work Agreement;
- Performance Review Form;
- Local Conservation Agency list;
- Applicable handbooks provided by MDARD/MACD etc.;
- Board meeting schedule.

## **Probationary Periods**

New employees are regarded as probationary until they have completed one hundred eighty (180) days of continuous service. This period is intended to allow the employee time to learn the job and become familiar with the District. It is an opportunity for the employee to experience the job, to become adjusted to required standards and expectations, and to decide if he/she would like to continue the employment. It is also an opportunity for the District Manager to evaluate the employee on job skills, cooperativeness, attitude, dependability, and other factors, which make a good and valuable employee. This period is used to assure that the employee is a good “match” for the job (i.e., capable and willing to perform up to standards and expectations). A written evaluation and conference will be conducted at sixty (60) day intervals (or as necessary) and is used to clarify expectations and provide feedback on past performance and goals for future performance.

An employee may resign without notice at any time during or at the end of the probationary period. The employee may be terminated without notice at any time during or at the end of the probationary period for misconduct, failure to meet the standards and expectations required for the position, or when it is apparent that the employee lacks the skills, ability or motivation necessary for successful job performance. Termination is a decision made by the Board based on information and a recommendation of the District Manager.

## **Work Schedule and Attendance**

Due to the nature of employment in the District, work schedules, attendance, pay and compensation, chain of command and other applicable guidance will be identified in all employee annual work agreements. Refer to the Annual Work Agreement section below for further guidance.

## **Annual Work Agreement**

An Annual Work Agreement is drafted and signed at the start of each fiscal year or at the beginning of employment. All employees are required to have a signed work agreement by both the employee and District Manager before employment begins. The work agreement will lay out the individual employees detailed job description along with the scheduled time of work, amount of pay and compensation, supervisory chain of command and other responsibilities. The Board approves the contents of all work agreements. The District Manager is responsible for the general administrative supervision of employees and will approve/sign all contractual agreements. Administrative Supervision by the District Manager will include the following:

- Ensure employees, and those providing guidance or direction to them, understand District personnel policies.
- Develop job descriptions and ensure current duty requirements are the same.
- Establish a work schedule.
- Set priority of work.
- Determine training needs and ensure they are provided and performance is satisfactory.
- Review and evaluate performance.
- Commend exceptional work relative to those working at the District or colleagues associated with grants funding an employee (e.g., FAP, CTAP).
- Respond to employee grievances.
- Establish and maintain satisfactory working arrangements and conditions.
- Meet with Board members to decide disciplinary actions, if necessary.

## **Office Supervision**

It is understood that all District employees will be under the general day-to-day supervision of the District Manager. The District Manager will be under the general supervision of the Board Chair. Initiative will be required on the employees' part to schedule program activities to accomplish the goals set forth in the applicable grant and/or work agreement. Although District Employees may be provided operational direction from an NRCS or other Agency employee, administrative responsibility and supervisory authority rests solely with the District Manager. In the event of an extended absence by the District Manager, a succession plan that details important document locations, operational guidance,

common websites used, etc., will be maintained in the same binder as this policy manual. The succession plan will contain enough information to allow an interim manager to step in and keep operations flowing.

## **Employer Responsibilities**

The District is responsible for the following:

*Social Security/Medicare* - by law the District is responsible to pay 50% of the Social Security and Medicare for each employee and the other 50% is withheld from paychecks. Contributions to these programs will show up on the employee pay stub under the heading “FICA” and “Medicare”.

*Workers Compensation Insurance* - by law the District is responsible to carry workers compensation insurance on each employee. Workers compensation insurance covers the employee in the event of an injury, illness, or death to the employee while carrying out his or her duties for the District. It provides three basic types of benefits:

- Medical-Hospital care benefits are exactly what they sound like: payments to offset the cost of medical treatment or hospital stays.
- Disability benefits are paid at a specified rate for a stated number of weeks for a partial or total disability. The amount of the weekly benefit is based on average pay, and is the same for partial or total disability, but the total disability benefit is payable for a longer period of time.
- Death benefits include a specified lump-sum amount for funeral expenses, plus weekly payments (based on employee earnings) to the estate.

For short-term absences due to worker’s compensation accidents, i.e. less than 7 days, employees may use their sick pay to cover the absence since payment is not forthcoming from worker’s compensation unless an employee exceeds the 7-day limit. The regular rule about sick pay applies with one exception. Vacation can be paid for the first day out, to hourly paid employees, and then sick pay would be used.

*Withholding Taxes* - by law the District is responsible to deduct and for the payment of, any and all withholding taxes to the appropriate governmental agency on behalf of the employee.

*Unemployment Insurance* - by law the District is responsible to pay the appropriate governmental agency the taxable rate of the gross wages for all employees. If you become unemployed through no fault of your own or are out of work, you may be covered with cash benefits. The laws of the Employment Security Commission in your state determine the amount of money you receive.

## **Employee Withholding Allowance Certificate**

Each employee must file with the District Manager, an Employee’s Withholding Allowance Certificate (Federal Form W-4). Payroll checks will not be released to any employee not having Forms W-4 properly filed and recorded. A revised W-4 form may be submitted at any time to report changes in the number of allowances; however, an employee is required to file, with the District Manager, a revised W-4 Form within 10 days if any of the following has taken place:

- The employee is divorced, legally separated, or the employee’s spouse begins claiming his or her own withholding exemption; or
- The employee no longer provides at least one-half the support of a dependent for whom he/she was previously entitled; or
- The employee should reasonably believe that a dependent previously claimed as an allowance will earn income of \$2,350.00 or more; or
- There is a reduction in the number of withholding allowances for estimated itemized deductions.
- In the event of the death of a spouse or dependent, a revised Form W-4 must be filed with the District Manager by December 31.

## Promotions and Transfers

The District follows, as far as possible, a policy of promotion from within and seeks to select the best-qualified individual to fill positions. To be considered for promotion, employees must have demonstrated sustained acceptable performance on the present job, attendance, and ability to perform specific job requirements of the new position. Probationary employees and employees with unsatisfactory performance history will not be eligible. Employees are not limited to a specific number of applications, but are encouraged to apply only for those jobs in which they are genuinely interested and qualified. Employees who transfer to a position must serve a two-month qualifying period in the new position.

## Performance Evaluations

Annual performance evaluations will be conducted on all employees to assess the employee's performance and to identify strengths and areas for improvement. Evaluations will be conducted annually, before the end of the fiscal year, or at any time deemed necessary. Evaluations will be used as a tool to improve employee performance and/or document the objective achievements of employees.

Evaluations will be based on the essential functions of each position as well as any related objectives, deliverables, and products associated with specific grants. The District Manager will conduct performance evaluations for all District employees (July), and the Board will conduct the performance evaluation of the District Manager (August). A formal discussion with the District Manager will take place prior to the meeting if requested by either the employee or the District Manager.

## Wage Scale Increases

Wage Scale increases will coincide with the beginning of each fiscal year and will be based on recommendation of the District Manager, with approval by the Board. Employees must serve a minimum of six (6) months prior to first increase; in which case the employee would be eligible at the beginning of the next fiscal year.

Employees may request a wage increase at any point during the calendar year. Upon request, the District Manager will schedule an evaluation and based on this criterion may recommend an increase in wages to the Board. The District Manager will make requests for wage increases, on behalf of oneself, directly to the Board. *Pay scale increases for grant employees are based on grant specifications.* However, the Board may approve a performance bonus at the end of each fiscal year. This decision will be based on the financial health of the District as well as the overall performance of the employee as documented in their annual evaluation.

## Time Sheets and Compensation

Federal and state laws require the District to keep accurate records of the hours employees work. A time sheet is the only record of the hours you have worked. Submit a signed time sheet to the District Manager at the close of each pay period. The District Manager is responsible for verifying accuracy and validity of the time sheets and signing them. Intentional failure to report accurate information is grounds for immediate dismissal.

Employees are paid on a bi-weekly basis. Only deductions required by State and Federal laws and those you authorize yourself will be deducted from your pay and are listed on your paystub. Paychecks are not available for early distribution, payroll advances, or as loans. The District Manager is responsible for distribution of paychecks following the end of the pay period through direct deposit. By law, the District is required to honor certain legal garnishments of your wages or salaries. The amount of compensation you will receive is provided in your work agreement. Mandatory deductions are Social Security, Medicare, and State and Federal withholding taxes. The District is responsible for paying for State unemployment taxes and workman's comp. The District is also responsible for reimbursement of travel using Federal standards for mileage and per diem.

## Compensatory Time

The District will adhere to all State and Federal laws and guidelines concerning compensatory time and overtime. If an employee expects to exceed the scheduled hours of a given week, the employee will adjust the work schedule to not

exceed 40 hours per week. In cases where this is not possible, compensatory time must be approved by the District Manager. No more than twenty (20) hours of compensatory time can be accrued and a rate of 1.5 time's hours worked. Employee must report on their time sheets provided by the District Manager, any comp time accrued or taken to maintain records. Exception of this policy can be obtained from the District Manager. All employees MUST receive prior permission to work overtime from the District Manager; if permission is not received then the time worked will not be considered part of the work performed under the District. Continued requests for permission after the fact may be grounds for termination.

## Holidays and Administrative Leave

Holidays shall be paid corresponding to legal holidays, as determined by Alpena and Montmorency Counties. Holiday pay for full-time employees is based on a regular 8-hour day. Part-time employees' holiday pay is based on a normal scheduled workday. Temporary/Seasonal employees are entitled to take the holidays, but they shall not be paid. All new full-time and part-time employees must work one full pay period before they are eligible for holiday pay.

*Martin Luther King Jr.'s Birthday*  
*President's Day*  
*Good Friday*  
*Memorial Day*

*Juneteenth*  
*Independence Day*  
*Labor Day*  
*Indigenous Peoples Day*

*Veterans Day*  
*Thanksgiving Day*  
*Day after Thanksgiving*  
*Christmas Eve Day-New Year's Day*

If a Holiday falls on a Sunday, it will be observed on the following Monday. If the Holiday falls on a Saturday, it will be observed on Friday. This rule does not apply to the holiday week of December 24th-January 1st. In the event the co-located office authorizes early closings of the office due to the holiday season, inclement weather, or any other reason, only those employees scheduled for work will be credited for administrative leave. Full-time employees will receive the full-authorized amount of leave. Part-time employees will be pro-rated. Temporary/Seasonal employees are entitled to leave but shall not be paid. Administrative leave will be approved by the District Manager.

## Paid Leave

Paid leave may be used for vacation, holidays, sickness (self or household member), funeral leave, or other work absence. All absences from a scheduled workday must be covered by leave, if leave is available. Absences due to work related injury may be covered by paid leave at your discretion. Unscheduled absences are subject to the District's attendance policy. Any leave planned to be taken for vacation purposes must be pre-scheduled. Requests for leave greater than three (3) days must be made at least one (1) week prior to proposed leave. Requests may be denied according to seniority, order that it was received (if two or more personnel request the same date of leave, the individual that made request first would receive priority), or other inconvenience to District activities due to an absence of personnel.

## Annual Leave (Paid Vacation)

Annual leave will be earned as follows:

<b>0 TO 3 YEARS EMPLOYMENT</b>	<b>4 HOURS PER PAY PERIOD</b>	<b>104 HOURS PER YEAR</b>
<b>3 TO 10 YEARS EMPLOYMENT</b>	<b>6 HOURS PER PAY PERIOD</b>	<b>156 HOURS PER YEAR</b>
<b>10-15 YEARS EMPLOYMENT</b>	<b>7 HOURS PER PAY PERIOD</b>	<b>182 HOURS PER YEAR</b>
<b>15 PLUS YEARS EMPLOYMENT</b>	<b>8 HOURS PER PAY PERIOD</b>	<b>208 HOURS PER YEAR</b>

New full-time employees can begin to accumulate annual leave with the completion of their first full pay period. Vacation time will be allocated at the beginning of each fiscal year. Employees needing to take time off during their probationary period may take leave without pay in increments of whole days or less, with District Manager's approval. After three months of continuous employment, accrued vacation time may be taken with District Manager's approval. Regular part-time employees will receive annual leave on a pro-rated basis. Annual Leave may be used throughout the year without limits. Employee anniversary dates will be recorded for the purpose of determining an increase in annual leave per year. Except for termination for unsatisfactory performance or misconduct, accrued vacation time will be computed and paid at the hourly rate up to a maximum of 80 hours. Annual leave carries over without limits from year to year.

## **Sick / Medical Leave**

All full-time employees are eligible for sick leave. Paid sick leave will be accrued at the rate of four (4) hours per pay period, for a total of 104 hours of paid sick leave annually. Employees needing to take time off during their probationary period are eligible for sick leave as approved by the District Manager. Part-time employees are given pro-rated sick leave upon approval from the District Manager.

Sick leave is a means of ensuring that an employee will not suffer loss of income because of illness. It is not a means by which an employee can earn additional leave. Sick leave may be used for personal illness, injury, appointments with your doctor or dentist (which cannot be scheduled during off duty hours), or for illness/injury in an employee's immediate family. Immediate family includes parents, spouses, children, siblings, wherever they may live, and related persons living in the employee's immediate household. When you are absent because of sickness or accident individuals must notify the District Manager within 12 hours. If the District Manager is not available at the office, make every effort to contact him/her. It is essential that you speak to someone or your sick leave may be denied and time taken from vacation or compensatory time. A doctor's statement may be required upon request from the District Manager for continuous sick leave for more than three (3) days. Each employee will maintain records and report sick leave on each payroll sheet. Failure to report sick leave correctly or intentionally altering sick leave hours is grounds for termination of employment.

Employees shall be allowed to carry over from year to year of continuous service any unused sick leave up to a maximum of 360 hours. Sick leave is considered an employee benefit during employment conditions; sick leave will not be paid out to an employee upon separation of employment.

*Workers Compensation Insurance* - by law the District is responsible to carry workers compensation insurance on each employee. Workers compensation insurance covers the employee in the event of an injury, illness, or death to the employee while carrying out his or her duties for the District. Any work-related injury must be reported to the District Manager immediately. For short-term absences due to worker's compensation accidents, e.g., less than 7 days, employees may use their sick leave to cover the absence since payment is not forthcoming from worker's compensation unless an employee exceeds the 7-day limit. The regular rule about sick pay applies with one exception. Vacation can be paid for the first day out, to hourly paid employees, and then sick pay would be used.

## **Funeral / Bereavement Leave**

An employee is permitted to use sick leave when a death occurs in his or her immediate family. Full-time employees are allowed a maximum amount of five (5) consecutive days with pay for funeral leave. Part-time employees are allowed a pro-rated basis. Beyond five days, an employee will need to use accrued compensatory time or annual leave to collect compensation. No payment will be made for funeral leave should the absence be on a nonscheduled workday, a scheduled leave day or on lay-off status. The District may require proof of relationship to the deceased. Immediate family member is defined as: husband/wife, father, mother, grandparent/great grandparent, brother, sister, child, stepfather, stepmother, stepbrother, stepsister, stepchild, grandchildren, mother-in-law/father-in-law, brother-in-law, sister-in-law, or foster children who have become members of family.

## **Court Leave (Jury Duty)**

Employees selected for jury duty or as a witness on regular scheduled workdays shall serve with no loss of pay. The employee shall be compensated only for the difference between the employee's regular pay and the pay received for jury duty, which shall be reported on their time sheet. You will notify the District Manager upon receiving a jury summons or subpoena as a witness.

## **Family Medical Leave Act**

Employees may take time off under Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) for several reasons. A worker is eligible for FMLA if he/she is recuperating from a serious health issue. FMLA leave is also available for employees caring for loved ones facing illness, impairment, incapacity, or injury resulting from:

- Conditions needing inpatient care
- Pregnancy or prenatal care

- More than three days of continuous medical care
- Mental conditions
- Chronic health issue
- Terminal illness or injury
- An extensive operation with treatments or conditions requiring three days care

Workers may take time off under FMLA for a child birth, if a family member gets called to military duty and the employee must take care of urgent demands, or to care for a loved one who suffered injury during active military service. Michigan workers may take up to 12 weeks leave in a 12-month time frame for health conditions, new babies, or other circumstances. These weeks renew every year as long as the worker meets eligibility requirements. Workers can take up to 26 weeks in 12 months to care for an injured family member who was hurt during active military service. FMLA leave is NOT paid leave, so workers are expected to and may be forced to use any accumulated paid time off (sick, annual, and comp. leave) during FMLA leave. When the FMLA leave ends, workers have the right of reinstatement to their original position or one equal to it. Employees must notify the District Manager as soon as possible when asking for a foreseeable FMLA leave, preferably 30 days prior. When the need for foreseeable leave arises within 30 days of the leave start date, workers must report leave the next day.

## **Military Leave**

The following guidelines will be used to assure compliance with the *Vietnam Era Veterans Assistance Act* of 1974. The District will grant appropriate military leaves of absence to full-time or part-time employees for the following types of military duties: Full-time active duty, active duty in Reserves or National Guard, weekend drills or summer training duty.

Employees are not required to use vacation time for their military training; however, they will not be paid for this additional time off.

## **Open Door & Ethics**

Employees are assured freedom from retaliation or discrimination for discussing problems, offering suggestions, asking questions or seeking the review of higher-level supervisors.

This policy emphasizes the special trust and cooperation that must exist between employees and District Managers. Problems are best solved when both parties feel free to discuss issues in an open and informal manner. For this reason, the District Manager will not discuss work-related employee matters with, or in the presence of, other employees or non-District personnel; with exception of discussion with the Board to address grievance, harassment, or other policy issue. Board Chair shall act as employee contact and Board liaison for issues related to the District Manager.

## **Harassment**

It is the goal of the District to provide a work environment free of tensions involving matters which do not relate to the District's operation. The District strongly disapproves of any form of ethnic, religious or sexual harassment involving any of its employees in the employment relationship. Actions or remarks involving ethnic or religious animosity, or conduct of sexual nature will not be tolerated. Employees without fear of reprisal, have the responsibility to bring any form of harassment to the District Manager. The District Manager (or Board Chair, if required) will investigate complaints concerning harassment promptly and in a confidential manner and the results reviewed only with the persons involved. Disciplinary action, up to and including discharge, will be taken against any employee engaging in any form of harassment.

## **Sexual Harassment**

The District is committed to providing a work environment where women and men can work together comfortably and productively, free from sexual harassment. Sexual harassment is illegal under both State and Federal law and will not be tolerated. This policy applies to all phases of employment including: recruiting, testing, hiring, upgrading, promotion or demotion, transfer, layoff, termination rates of pay, benefits and selection for training, travel, or District social events.

Prohibited sexual harassment includes: unsolicited and unwelcome contact that has sexual overtones including, written contact, verbal contact, physical contact, and visual contact. Offering benefits, such as promotions, favorable performance evaluations, favorable assigned duties or shifts, recommendations for or reclassifications in exchange for sexual favors is forbidden. Sexual harassment does not refer to occasional compliments or other conduct or actions that arise out of a personal or social relationship that are socially acceptable and not intended to have a discriminatory effect on employment.

Any employee bringing a sexual harassment complaint, or assisting in investigating such a complaint, will not be adversely affected in terms of employment or discriminated against or discharged because of the complaint. Complaints of such retaliation will be promptly investigated and punished. The District is responsible for taking action to effectively deal with all acts of sexual harassment occurring in the workplace or as part of the employment relationship, regardless of the manner in which it becomes aware of the conduct. This includes the acts of supervisory or management personnel, non-management employees and third-parties. If a complaint involves the District Manager, report directly to any Board member. If complaint does not involve the District Manager, report to District Manager.

Upon receiving an accusation of sexual harassment against an employee of the District, the District will investigate and, if substantiated, will initiate the appropriate disciplinary procedures. There is a five (5) year limitation period from the date of occurrence for filing a charge that may lead to discipline.

An individual who makes an accusation of sexual harassment will be informed at the close of the investigation, whether or not disciplinary procedures will be initiated; and any disciplinary procedures, or the discipline imposed, if any.

## **Drug and Alcohol Policy**

It is the policy of the District to prohibit the use, sale, dispensing, or possession of drugs or alcohol in the District's office or vehicles. It is the responsibility of each employee to maintain professional conduct during site visits, meetings, and all District events.

## **Dress Code and Personal Grooming**

Office attire will consist of neat, casual wear with the goal of providing a professional appearance of District personnel, while still meeting the needs of fieldwork. Personal grooming, hygiene and clothing reflect your attitude toward yourself and indicate to the public the expectation of level of service of the District. It is imperative all clothing be appropriate for the duties of the individual. Field attire may consist of clothing that meets OSHA safety regulations.

## **Safety**

Precautions will be observed at all times on the job. District employees are required to wear appropriate protective clothing or equipment for the type of work being performed. Shirts and long pants are to be worn in the field (shorts may be worn if activity will entail working in the water and is appropriate for the activity). The District will furnish hard hats and specialized protective equipment or clothing appropriate to the operation. The District may purchase clothing items with the District logo for employees. In addition, employees whose duties require at least 50% of their time doing field work will be provided an annual stipend or \$250 for replacement of worn clothing items, payable at the beginning of each fiscal year. The District shall be guided by the health and safety standards set forth by the applicable state and federal regulations when making such purchases.

In order to maintain a safe workplace, employees are encouraged to report unsafe conditions or work hazards. Never take chances; the safe way is the most efficient way. Certain hazards exist by the nature of our business and employees must use good judgment and common sense in dealing with them. Should an employee be injured on the job, he/she must report the incident to the District Manager immediately to ensure prompt medical attention and proper notifications are made. Failure to promptly report an on-the-job injury could result in your loss of worker's compensation insurance benefits. *Employees do not need to contact their supervisor in emergencies.*

## **Confidential Information**

While performing duties at the District, employees may have access to information that is confidential. No employee is permitted to reveal or discuss anywhere, or at any time, any information that may be confidential.

## **Searches of District Property**

The District Manager reserves the right to search all areas of the District office, including desks, files, containers, storage room and items, outside grounds, lockers, district vehicles parked in the parking lot, computers and their contents. All information on District computers is considered District property. The District Manager may not search an employee's body, clothes, purse, wallet, vehicle, or private files (files must be marked as "personal" or "private"), or personal computers, phones or tablets.

## **Telephones / Faxes / E-mails / Internet**

The sole purpose of the District's office equipment is to conduct District business. Personal use of office equipment is not allowed without the consent of the District Manager; and each employee must utilize good judgment in keeping personal interruptions to a minimum. Personal use of equipment should be made at break and meal times and limited as this time is intended for work related discussion as well as relaxation. Long distance calls may not be charged to District phones without written permission from the District Manager.

## **Travel, Lodging, and Meals**

The District's business needs from time to time require employees to travel and incur costs in the performance of their jobs. It is our goal that travel expenditures are made only when justified by expected benefits that contribute to the District's profitability or mission. The District may cover meals, lodging, and travel in such cases. No employee should incur expenses and expect reimbursement unless authorized by the District Manager. This will provide an opportunity for the expected benefits of the expenditure to be weighed against the estimated cost. Employees shall receive reimbursement for approved travel. Employees are expected to furnish or make arrangements for their own transportation to and from their place of work. When traveling to and from work no mileage will be paid. Travel expenses to special meetings outside of normal work hours must be pre-approved by the District Manager. Employees shall receive reimbursement for approved lodging and meals when traveling for District business. The District will use the annual federal per diem rates established by U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) for reimbursements. These rates consist of a maximum lodging allowance component and a meals and incidental expenses (M&IE) component. Refer to the IRS website for current rates.

## **Personal Information**

It is important that the District maintain accurate personnel records at all times. You are responsible for notifying the District Manager of any change in name, home address, telephone number, immigration status, or any other pertinent information to avoid compromise of your benefit eligibility, the return of W-2 forms, or similar inconvenience.

## **Grievance Procedure**

District employees have a responsibility to serve the public with courtesy, integrity and efficiency. The District and its Board have a responsibility to protect employees from arbitrary and unfair treatment and to provide a means whereby grievances, appeals from adverse actions, and complaints of discrimination can be presented, heard, and adjudicated on their merits. The District recognizes the right of employees to express their grievances and to seek a solution concerning disagreements arising from working relationships, working conditions, employment practices or differences of interpretation of policy, which might arise between the District and its employees. Board Chair shall act as employee contact and Board liaison for issues related to District Manager.

Every attempt should be made to resolve complaints and grievances at the lowest possible level on an informal basis. Employees may pursue the following avenues to resolve the complaint or grievance.

- Inform District Manager of complaint or grievance to discuss and resolve issue. If complaint or grievance is regarding District Manager the Board Chair can be informed.

- If complaint or grievance is unresolved the employee shall reduce the grievance to writing within five (5) working days of the grievance and deliver it to the District Manager. A conference will be held with the employee, District Manager, and the Board within ten (10) working days of the receipt of the written grievance.
- After discussing the issue with the Board, the District Manager and the employee, the Board shall make its recommendation for resolving the issues to the District Manager and employee. The Board's recommendation will be considered final.

## **Work Rules and Disciplinary Action**

Employees are expected to observe “common sense” rules of honesty, good conduct, general job interest, safe practices, and to adhere to generally accepted customs of good taste in our relations with each other. In our organization, as in any group with a common purpose, rules are necessary. Occasionally, the District may find it necessary to take disciplinary action against an employee for violating a District rule or regulation. The type of disciplinary action taken, be it in the form of a verbal/written warning or immediate termination, is dependent upon the severity and frequency of the infraction. Implementing disciplinary action does not waive the right to discharge any employee “at will”, but is to encourage positive development and behavior.

The types of disciplinary action are:

1. Informal Counseling / Verbal Warning - A verbal warning / counseling is given by the District Manager in cases where violations are minor in nature, or for an offense normally requiring a written warning being called to an employee’s attention the first time. It is a discussion between the District Manager and employee and should be used to prevent minor problems from growing into major ones. Mentioning future discipline should be avoided. No record shall be entered into the employee's file; however, a notice of warning will be kept on record during employment. The District Manager should discuss the problem with the employee and explain why the conduct or performance is unacceptable and why it is important.
2. Formal Counseling / Written Warning - A written warning is a formal warning given after the repetition of an infraction a verbal warning has been given or for an offense constituting misconduct of a serious enough nature to use this step for the first offense. It should include a caution to the employee that a repetition of the offense or the continuation of an unsatisfactory condition will result in further disciplinary action, up to and including discharge. Formal counseling need not be preceded by informal counseling. When formal counseling is issued, the employee must be given three (3) days to respond to such counseling. After the three-day period, the issuer will consider all factors and make a determination if the counseling will stand as written, be amended or rescinded. A copy of the formal counseling memorandum and any matters submitted by the employee will be included in the employee's personnel file. At the employee's request, it may be removed after one year.
3. Discipline - Discipline is intended to be of a positive and developmental nature rather than a punishing procedure. The District Manager or the Board of Directors will determine discipline and/or discharge with consultation by both parties. Again, the employee will be given three (3) days to submit matters in their defense prior to a final decision being made. Discipline up to and including dismissal will be considered for any of the following reasons. The following list is not to be considered an exhaustive list and other reasons as determined by the Board could result in discipline.
  - Repeated breaking of work rules, including refusal to carry out directions of the supervisor/manager, and lack of cooperation on the job.
  - Repeated unacceptable work performance or personal behavior on the job, including: theft of any kind, abuse of equipment, unsafe work practice, falsification of records or time sheets, use of alcohol, drugs, vulgar or abusive language.
  - Repeated, gross negligence, which results or could result in serious injury to another employee or to District property.
  - Repeated willful waste of materials or supplies.
  - Repeated use of abusive language toward an employee, supervisor or District representative on District property.
  - Repeated physical or verbal abuse of visitors or other employees.

4. **Termination** - The District shall use the least severe discipline necessary to correct a situation. However, when repeated attempts to correct a situation fail, or when an action is deemed severe enough, an employee may be discharged. If the employee feels that they were terminated unfairly the employee should follow Grievance Procedure Policy.

## Termination of Employment

The end of an employment relationship with the District will fall within one of the following categories:

1. **Resignation** - A voluntary termination freely made by the employee for any reason. The District should be given at least a two (2)-week notice.
2. **Mutual Agreement** - Whereby both parties think it would be mutually beneficial to end the employment relationship. Under these circumstances, the District sets no termination notice period, and a departure date is informally agreed upon within a reasonable time period.
3. **Reduction in Force** - Resulting from job elimination due to financial considerations, determined by the District. Any employee so affected will be given a two weeks' notice period, with reasonable unpaid time off during the notice period for job interviews.
4. **At-Will Release** - A release of an employee due to general dissatisfaction with their work and ability contribute to the District's mission.
5. **Unsatisfactory Performance** - Failure of an employee to meet performance standards, such as failure to complete tasks in a timely competent way, or failure to maintain and necessary / adequate work period.
6. **Misconduct** - Involving gross employee behavior on the job, such as refusal to do work reasonably expected, wrongful use or taking of District property, failure to comply with the personnel policy, or conviction of a felony.

Except for termination because of unsatisfactory performance or misconduct, all accrued annual leave up to 80 hours will be paid to the individual according to stated policies. Employees resigning their employment with the District are asked to inform the District Manager as early as possible, but no later than two (2) weeks before his/her last day. This requirement is waived for employees during their initial probationary period. Payment for accumulated leave will not be paid to an employee if the probationary period is not fulfilled satisfactorily.

Final payments shall be withheld until District Manager can confirm all District property has been returned and all appropriate files, materials, and associated equipment have been left in suitable condition. Items associated with a position, whether funded through the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development or other funding agency, are considered the property of the District and not the person or position. Removing items or deleting files, such as landowner or project files, are not the responsibility or right of a District employee. Deleted files and items removed or left in unsuitable condition shall constitute malicious intent and all final payments will be withheld until adequately compensated. Determining compensation may be achieved through monetary retention, mediation, and/or legal action.

## Policy Adoption and Administration

This handbook has been compiled to inform you of District practices, policies and benefits. Please read each section carefully. Use the policies and principles within as a guide in the performance of your duties. The Board is responsible for

approval, implementation, and subsequent amendment of this policy. The District Manager shall review these policies and procedures annually and recommend to the Board any amendments to them, and recommend actions.

**These policies were adopted on:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Board Chairman:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Board Vice-Chair:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Board Secretary/Treasurer:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Board Director:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Board Director:** \_\_\_\_\_

I have received and read this Personnel Policy that outlines the benefits, policies and employee's responsibilities for the District. I will familiarize myself and comply with the information contained in the handbook.

I understand the importance of continuity of staffing in the District and I accept the need for flexibility as part of my job. I realize that job requirements may require me to work in other counties or to work overtime.

Since the information in this handbook is necessarily subject to change as situations warrant, it is understood that changes in policies may supersede, review, or eliminate the policies in the handbook.

**Employee:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Employer: Alpena-Montmorency Conservation District**

## Appendix A – Pre Authorized Payments

### List of Pre-Authorized Payments for 2024-2025

#### Attachment to Internal Monetary Controls

Payments may be made to these vendors, in an amount not to exceed the stated limit, prior to full Board approval.

<b>Payee</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Limit</b>
Post Office	Routine Postage	amount due
PIE&G	Warehouse power	amount due
A&L Labs	Soil Tests	amount due
Maner-Consterisan	QuickBooks Online	amount due
U.S. Treasury	Payroll taxes	amount due - EFT
State of Michigan	Payroll & Sales Taxes	amount due - EFT
State of Michigan – UIA	Insurance Policies	amount due – EFT

## Appendix B – Ungulate Policy

### Problem Statement

In some cases, native wildlife species present potential limitations to the AMCD and/or its related programs meeting their missions. For instance, browse by native ungulates such as elk (*Cervus canadensis*) and white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) can reduce forest complexity and alter forest ecosystem function. These ungulates, therefore, can limit how the AMCD addresses biodiversity concerns outlined in the *Conservation Needs Assessment* and how FAP addresses the ecological integrity portion of its stated mission in some instances.

While not covered herein, other species of native wildlife, such as the Canada goose (*Branta canadensis*) or the spruce budworm (*Choristoneura* spp.), can also be considered pests in some instances. As time permits and concerns are raised, the District Board retains the right to update this policy manual to give the Board and District staff ways of communicating cohesively and consistently evidence-based concerns related to native wildlife and their management. The example, below, for white-tailed deer provides a working model for how this is to be done.

The white-tailed deer (hereafter, deer) is a native ungulate that influences the economic, social, and ecological sustainability of forest ecosystems in the northeastern Lower Peninsula of Michigan (hereafter, neLP). This region has been a focal area for deer hunting since the early-20<sup>th</sup> century after widespread logging, land clearing, predator removal, and land abandonment provided the opportunity for the development of hunting enterprises/camps by those living farther south in Michigan. Many of the larger hunt clubs in the area were developed in the 1930s and now are >10,000 acres.

The adverse effects to which deer populations have on native biodiversity and native ecosystem function are profound and numerous (see review of ecosystem impacts in Rooney and Waller 2003). These adverse effects have been known for some time (Leopold et al. 1947). Past and current deer population levels are largely the result of direct or indirect human actions (Rooney and Waller 2003, Leopold et al. 1947), including the removal from the region of the wolf (*Canis lupus*) as a top-tier predator (Nowak 2002). Across neLP, management for a larger deer herd has occurred in concert with production-oriented forestry and agriculture.

Prior to European settlement, neLP had significantly more area devoted to coniferous forests (Comer and Albert 1995), wolves (Nowak 2002), and far fewer deer (Leopold et al. 1947). The “Great Cutover” and slash fires fueled by logging debris began a shift in these forests from conifers to clonal aspen systems and oak species, both of which, unlike conifers, readily stump sprout (Whitney 1986, 1987). Deer benefited from this landscape change and the removal of wolves.

Subsequent management and human land use have continued the process of aspen (*Populus* spp.) and oak (*Quercus* spp.) dominance relative to pre-European condition (Schulte et al. 2007, Corace et al. 2012). Direct management for more deer and the indirect results of other land uses (agriculture) have synergistically maintained or promoted a high deer population in the region.

Over much of neLP, forests are of low ecological integrity and poorly positioned to be resilient or resistant to climate change or other stressors (*pers. obs.*, Duveneck et al. 2014). Continued management for conditions to provide deer food further complicates the ecological sustainability of area forests because complexity required for climate change adaptation is unintentionally being removed in efforts to establish forests dominated by oaks and food plots comprised of non-native plant species.

### **Proposed Action(s)**

While AMCD acknowledges the social and economic value of deer hunting in neLP, the AMCD acknowledges that deer have significant negative impact on native ecosystems and, in many instances, pose a threat to their ecological sustainability. Therefore, the AMCD will promote a policy that aims to 1) reduce the overall herd size by promoting aggressive antlerless deer harvesting, 2) promote the establishment of native plant species in deer habitat management, and 3) promote and encourage more natural forest patterns of composition (plant species mix) and structure (vertical and horizontal arrangement of vegetation).

For any given species, habitat is commonly defined as food, water, and cover. The concept of landscape conservation has sometimes added “area” as a fourth component. As often practiced, deer habitat management in neLP has led to the reduction of area in native ecosystems (forests) to areas that generally provide only one of the four habitat components: food. Some landowners have actually bulldozed forests to put in food plots comprised of plant species considered invasive by some professionals in the State of Michigan.

Rather than solely promote “food”, we will encourage landowners to think about another habitat element: “cover.” For instance, the AMCD will promote more forest complexity by encouraging the planting of tree species native to Michigan, including those considered to be climate-adapted. When planted either densely or in scattered areas (and protected where need be), plantings of these species will provide either short-term bedding cover or cover through travel corridors.

AMCD will also promote new approaches to deer food plots by suggesting the use of areas on properties that are already altered instead of carving out areas in forests. These areas would include gas well sites, log landings, skid trails or other roadways, etc. The AMCD will also promote other means to manage food plots that minimize the use of herbicides, fertilizers, and other chemicals. Such approaches may include the use of mechanical scarification and/or the use of tarps to kill herbaceous vegetation. Finally, the AMCD will continue to investigate food plot mixes that contain less noxious or invasive plants to further reduce the negative impacts that deer habitat management may have on our native ecosystems.

### **Literature Cited**

Albert, D.A. and P.J. Comer. 2008. Atlas of early Michigan’s forests, grasslands, and wetlands: an interpretation of the 1816-1856 General Land Office surveys. Michigan State University Press, East Lansing, MI.

Corace, R.G. III, Shartell, L.M., Schulte, L.A., Brininger, W.L., McDowell, M.K.D. and D.M. Kashian. 2012. An ecoregional context for forest management on National Wildlife Refuges of the Upper Midwest, USA. *Environmental Management* 49:359–371.

Duveneck, M., Scheller, R.M., White, M.A., Handler, S.D. and C. Ravenscroft. 2014. Climate change effects on northern Great Lake (USA) forests: a case for preserving diversity. *Ecosphere* 5:1-26.

Leopold, A., Sows, L.K. and D.L. Spencer. 1947. A survey of over-populated deer ranges in the United States. *The Journal of Wildlife Management* 11:162-177.

Rooney, T.P. and D.M. Waller. 2003. Direct and indirect effects of white-tailed deer in forest ecosystems. *Forest Ecology and Management* 181:165-176.

Schulte, L.A., Mladenoff, D.J. Crow, T.R., Merrick, L.C. and D.T. Cleland. 2007. Homogenization of northern U.S. Great Lakes forests due to land use. *Landscape Ecology* 22:1089-1103.

Whitney, G.G. 1986. Relation of Michigan's pre-settlement pine forests to substrate and disturbance history. *Journal of Ecology* 67:1548-1559.

Whitney, G.G. 1987. An ecological history of the Great Lakes forest of Michigan. *Journal of Ecology* 75:667-684.