

DuPage Monarch Project Communities Protecting Pollinators

Annual Report 2025

DuPage Forest Preserve District
River Prairie Group Illinois Sierra Club
The Conservation Foundation
Wild Ones Greater DuPage

Founding Partners

Forest Preserve District DuPage County
River Prairie Group of the Illinois Sierra Club
The Conservation Foundation
Wild Ones Greater DuPage

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Forest Preserve District DuPage County

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Wild Ones Greater DuPage



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Executive Summary

There's an adage in the prairie restoration community that encourages people to take the long view and patiently wait for the results of their work to become visible. "In the first year plants sleep, the second they creep and the third year they leap." It took us longer than three years to leap but this year we did.

Ten years ago DMP began with a seed of an idea. We believed that a small group of people could implement locally the national strategy of protecting monarch butterflies by encouraging and supporting public and private landowners to plant native milkweed and nectar plants.

We learned native plants were being planted on public land for reducing flooding and erosion, improving water quality and reducing maintenance on turf in areas that were difficult to mow. Supporting monarch butterflies was rarely a goal in their design but milkweed was often on the plant list. An important pollinator was missing, native bees had not yet become part of the conversation.

Research was just beginning to confirm what had been suspected, insects were declining and so dramatically it was called an apocalypse. The loss of suitable habitat was a factor and planting native was advocated as the solution but what did native bees need to thrive?

Our response to this news was adding native bees to our mission and pollinators to our name. From a single focus on monarchs, we became the DuPage Monarch Project: Communities Protecting Pollinators. We reseeded our mission and were back to step one. It would take time to see the results.

We learned habitat for monarchs also benefits native bees but there are important differences in what they need. There is only one monarch butterfly and 400 - 500 species of native bees in Illinois. Meeting the needs of all or even most of them is complicated. There are generalist foragers that eat many different kinds of pollen and nectar while others are specialists that rely on flowers of only a few kinds of flowers with a few ultra specialists that limit foraging to a single species. Some bees are social and live in colonies while the majority of bee species are solitary with a single female doing all the work to provision each egg she lays in a nest dug in the ground or carved into a plant stem.

It took a few years to develop materials and programs for educational outreach about native bees but the timing was right because the public's interest in native plant gardening and pollinators had been steadily growing. By March of 2025, the event we hosted featuring five presentations about bees, butterflies and gardening for pollinators attracted over 800 attendees.

Executive Summary

We learned Representative Janet Yang Rohr, who represents Naperville and Warrenville, shares our concern about the future of native bees. She wanted to help by introducing a law to designate an Illinois State Bee. Her thoughtful approach to deciding which bee would receive this honor was to ask the eighth-grade teachers at Lincoln Junior High in Naperville to design a research project for their students. The students researched ten different species and chose three candidates, the American bumble bee, black and gold bumble bee and bicolored striped sweat bee. Students around the state were given the opportunity to vote for their choice of bee to be the state symbol. The black and gold bumble bee was selected. Whatever the outcome of the bill, this was a remarkable opportunity for students to learn about native bees.

I am energized by the commitment our membership has shown to adding more natural areas and the progress being made in the public's awareness of the importance of native bees and the challenges they face.

Our 60+ members have adopted an attitude of "places with space" can become part of the solution to pollinator decline. A Geographic Information System (GIS) habitat mapping site created by the county will reveal where those spaces are located. Glen Ellyn Park District developed a community science project for monitoring butterflies and bees that will provide much needed data about the flowers they're visiting. The combination of more habitat with higher quality forage will take pollinator conservation in DuPage to the next level.

Leaping isn't the end. It's the beginning of a thriving community of people and organizations bringing nature home.



Sunnyside Park
Bloomingdale Park District

The Year in Numbers

48.54

ACRES OF NEW, RESTORED,
ENHANCED HABITAT

410

ACRES OF NATURAL AREAS
MAINTAINED

1,126

NATIVE TREES AND SHRUBS
ADDED TO PARKWAYS, PARKS
& RESTORATIONS

131

NATURAL AREAS ADDED TO
HABITAT MAP

9

GUIDED SITE VISITS

12

DUPAGE MONARCH PROJECT
PROGRAMS & TABLING EVENTS

41

REGISTERED MONARCH
WAYSTATIONS

542

NEW FACEBOOK FOLLOWERS

393.5K

REACH

Innovative Thinking Increased Habitat, Fostered a Community Science Project & Inspired Conservation Tool

Loss of habitat is a primary cause of pollinator decline. This year's award winning projects looked at habitat with new eyes and came up with novel approaches for planting more and better natural areas for pollinators.

Where There's Space, Downers Grove Plants Habitat

Over the years, the Village of Downers Grove has cultivated a culture of conservation that encompasses pollinator habitat, renewable energy, energy efficiency, active transportation and protecting the night sky. In 2012, the Village incorporated green infrastructure into their plan for managing stormwater and improving water quality. A newly established stormwater utility included a public/private partnership with homeowners for converting roadside drainage ditches into beautiful, beneficial pollinator-friendly areas at no cost to the homeowner. The popular program funds ten bioswales per year and currently has a waiting list of 40 applicants.

The benefits realized by the Bioswale Program set the stage for continuing the use of native plantings in new projects like the recently completed Civic Center, which has rain gardens and Conservation@Work certified native landscaping.

An Environmental Sustainability Plan (ESP) adopted in 2025 continues the Village's commitment to naturalized areas. It includes pollinator friendly goals and actions including identifying areas for native plantings, improving the biodiversity of parkway trees, and exploring ways of meeting Dark Sky Community Guidelines. There are also several suggested actions in the ESP for reducing a homeowner's ecological footprint such as shrinking lawns and adding native landscaping.

Downers Grove received the 2025 Jane Foulser Habitat Award for demonstrating a comprehensive approach to establishing natural areas throughout the community on public and private land.



Natural area
signage
Downers Grove



Pollinator planting
Belmont Station
Downers Grove



Drainage ditch
bioswale
Downers Grove

Volunteers Are Habitat Heroes

Increasing habitat is the first step in reversing the decline of bees and butterflies. When the plants are in the ground, the next step is finding out which species and how many of them are showing up. Glen Ellyn Park District took that step by adding a citizen science component to their volunteer program. Habitat Heroes is a survey for making and recording observations of the butterflies and bees found in the park district's natural areas.

Over the past two years, Chris Gutmann, Manager of Natural Areas & Outdoor Education and Laurie Bellmar, Environmental Outreach Specialist, developed and tested survey protocols for counting the species and abundance of bees and butterflies in areas planted and maintained as pollinator habitat. In the summer of 2025, Chris and Laurie along with 18 volunteers conducted a successful trial run of the survey. Habitat Heroes will be implemented at two natural areas in 2026 and eventually surveys will be conducted at all of the natural areas.

Pollinator habitat is a complex system of plants, insects and weather interactions. When there is a limited amount of land available for more habitat, it's essential that the existing habitat provides high quality forage. The data gathered by the volunteers is the beginning of understanding how well the natural areas are achieving the goal of supporting bees and butterflies. The data will be used for tracking changes in pollinator abundance and species richness from year to year so decisions can be made about how to improve habitat performance.

Glen Ellyn Park District received the Pat Miller Community Engagement Award for developing Habitat Heroes, a community science program for conducting pollinator surveys in natural areas.



Bumble bee visiting a fall blooming aster
Maryknoll Park Glen Ellyn Park District



Pollinator habitat
Churchill Park, Glen Ellyn Park District

Reconnecting the Pieces

The Pollinator Protector of the Year is awarded to an organization or person who initiates a new or expanded approach to the conservation of pollinators.

There is not only less habitat for butterflies and bees but what's left is like the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, small and disconnected. Creating connections between the pieces increases the benefit for wildlife. Honey bees were the stepping stone for making this happen when discussions of a new beekeeping ordinance highlighted the presence of many different kinds of bees in Illinois.

Honey bees and native bees, from bumble bees to sweat bees, rely on the same flowers for their food. The new honey bee ordinance passed by DuPage County in 2024 relaxed the restrictions on bee keeping. With each new hive, there are many thousands of worker bees foraging for food, increasing the competition for nectar and pollen. Adding more flower rich natural areas is essential to ensure there is enough food for maintaining honey bees and reducing the threat of less food for native bees.

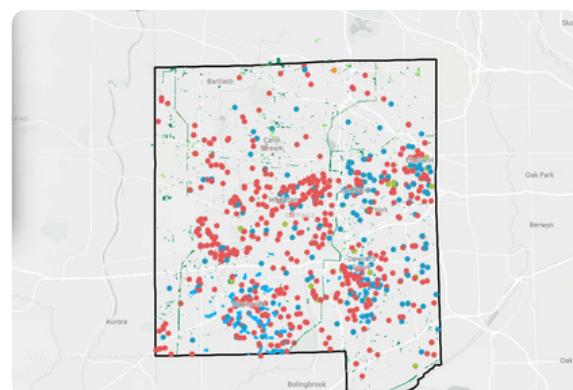
Staff of the county's GIS Division created a map for capturing the amount and location of existing natural areas. They designed an online Hubsite for public and private landowners to submit areas to a county-wide map of pollinator habitat.. As more natural areas are added, a landscape-scale view of habitat will emerge, making it possible to assess whether there is enough forage for supporting honey and native bees. It can identify the best places for adding more natural areas to reduce habitat fragmentation and create pollinator corridors.

The map is a new tool for protecting pollinators in DuPage County. It enables a broader perspective on pollinator conservation and facilitates collaborations across political boundaries on a problem that affects all of us. Communities working together to create naturalized and connected landscapes will save what the American biologist E.O. Wilson called “the little things that run the world.”

The DuPage County GIS Division received the Pollinator Protector of the Year Award for designing the Pollinator Habitat Map.



HubSite for Mapping Pollinator Habitat



Pollinator Habitat Map

DuPage County

Community Engagement

Conservation is a state of harmony
between men and land.

--- Aldo Leopold



Left to right: **Save the Date for the Pollinator Blitz**, March 15, Mayslake, Oak Brook Photo: Courtesy DuPage Forest Preserve District; **Flight, Buzz & Bloom**, Program about Native Bees presented to the Lombard Garden Club; **Jill Speelman, DuPage Monarch Project Educator** explaining how to make a mosquito dunk for controlling adult mosquitoes without spraying, Westmont Public Library Monarch Fest



Left to Right: **Protecting Pollinators Across DuPage**, a video featuring DMP partners and members; **Film Crew Jeremy Farrar and Grayson Zweibruck** at Cerny Park, Warrenville; **Connie Schmidt** representing DuPage Monarch Project at Saving Monarchs Garden Party hosted by Joe LeCroy

Awards

<u>Year</u>	<u>Award</u>	<u>Recipient</u>
2019	Monarch Friendly Community Award	West Chicago
2020	Jane Foulser Habitat Award	Fox Valley Park District
2020	Pat Miller Community Engagement Award	Naperville Park District
2021	Jane Foulser Habitat Award	Naperville Park District
2021	Pat Miller Community Engagement Award	Village of Westmont
2022	Jane Foulser Habitat Award	Lisle Park District
2022	Pat Miller Community Engagement Award	Fox Valley Park District
2023	Jane Foulser Habitat Award	DuPage County
2023	Pat Miller Community Engagement Award	FermiLab Natural Areas
2023	Pollinator Protector of the Year	Darien Garden Club
2024	Jane Foulser Habitat Award	Elmhurst Park District & Village of Villa Park
2024	Pat Miller Community Engagement Award	Anna Bakker
2024	Pollinator Protector of the Year	Mary Onorad
2025	Jane Foulser Habitat Award	Downers Grove
2025	Pat Miller Community Engagement Award	Glen Ellyn Park District
2025	Pollinator Protector of the Year	DuPage County GIS Division

Photo Credits

Cover	Bumble bee & monarch butterfly, Keith A. Olson Prairie, Elmhurst Park District	Jeremy Farrar
p. 4	Sunnyside Park, Bloomingdale Park District	Lonnie Morris
p. 5	Natural area signage Downers Grove Pollinator planting, Belmont Station Downers Grove Drainage ditch bioswale Downers Grove	Courtesy Village of Downers Grove Courtesy Village of Downers Grove Lonnie Morris
p. 6	Bumble bee on New England aster, Maryknoll Park Glen Ellyn Park District Pollinator Habitat, Churchill Park, Glen Ellyn Park District	Jeremy Farrar Lonnie Morris Courtesy of DuPage Forest Preserve
p. 7	Pollinator Habitat Map HubSite Home Page Pollinator Habitat Map	HubSite HubSite
p. 9	Save the Date for the Pollinator Blitz Flight, Buzz Bloom Jill Spealman demonstrating a mosquito dunk Protecting Pollinators Across DuPage, YouTube Jeremy Farrar & Grayson Zweibruck, film crew Connie Schmidt, Saving Monarchs Garden Party	Beth Peluse Lonnie Morris Jeremy Farrar Grayson Zweibruck Connie Schmidt Joe Lecroy