

## *Improve Connectivity for Pollinators and Wildlife*

### Strategies

Pollinators are integral to ensuring the longevity of the base of the natural food web, without which all other species, including humans, would struggle to survive. Bees are most commonly thought of when pollinators are discussed, however, over 100,000 invertebrates—including bees, butterflies, beetles, moths, wasps, and flies—and more than a thousand mammals, birds, reptiles, and amphibians take on the job of pollinating plants as well<sup>1</sup>. Much of Erie County is located within the Eastern Wildway and the Western New York Wildway making it all the more valuable to protect the pollinators within it. Pollination is a symbiotic relationship for the plant and animal, meaning both parties benefit. The pollinator consumes protein rich pollen and high energy nectar from the plant, while the plant's pollen catches a free ride to other neighboring plants of the same species, allowing fertilization to occur. Pollinators fertilize both wild plants and the agricultural crops we use for food.

Without pollinators, plants rely on other modes of fertilization, such as pollen carried by the wind, however, this is highly inefficient and unsuccessful, meaning that we can attribute one-third of the food we eat to the successful fertilization that occurs through pollinators. As a result, their importance to not only a balanced ecosystem, but also our own food production cannot be understated. Yet, pollinator numbers are on the decline as they face serious threats. Habitat loss due to changing weather patterns and temperatures, pesticide poisoning and diseases are some of the main causes of decline, resulting in endangered wild bee species and monarch butterflies declining by 90% over the past 20 years<sup>2</sup>. Despite the trending decline, 2022 showed an increase in monarch populations over wintering in Mexico, which may signify that conservation and protection actions do in fact work.<sup>3</sup> In the midst of climate change, native plants will thrive in our climate and as such will require less maintenance as the appropriate growing conditions are already present. Native, perennial plants that provide shelter or food for wildlife are also integral for promoting a healthy ecosystem and biodiversity.

Improving the connectivity for pollinators and wildlife can be done easily, inexpensively, and scaled from the park service level to the individual resident. In fact, residents of Erie County are already spearheading these initiatives by certifying the entire City of Buffalo as a National Wildlife Federation Wildlife Habitat Community, with Erie County's certification close behind it. Certification requires a certain amount of green spaces to be converted into pollinator and wildlife friendly habitats that encourage a symbiotic existence between humans and nature, as opposed to living in opposition with it. It also requires education and outreach efforts that spread the understanding and knowledge of how to plant with nature in mind. The City of Buffalo became the 17th largest in

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nwf.org/Educational-Resources/Wildlife-Guide/Pollinators>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nwf.org/Educational-Resources/Wildlife-Guide/Pollinators>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.theyucatantimes.com/2022/06/data-on-monarch-butterflies-in-2022-show-a-sharp-increase-in-their-numbers>

the country when it was certified and Erie County will be the 5th largest, proving that the work being conducted in Erie County has nationwide importance.

### Action Items

1. Encourage non certified pollinator friendly habitat
  - a. Work with organizations like Home for a Gnome, Citizen Coalition for Wildlife and Environment, Save the Bees WNY, Master Gardeners, Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper
2. Continue habitat certification efforts
  - a. Connect with the local organization working towards these certifications and learn how individual residents and local green spaces can become certified.
    - i. Black Rock Riverside Alliance [NWF Community Habitat Project](#)
  - b. Using the definition for disadvantaged communities established by the Climate and Community Leadership Act (CLCPA), address the discrepancy in access to green spaces in this area and create habitat gardens in these communities. By planting native, blooming plants, the green space requires little to no maintenance and will enhance local biodiversity and ecosystem health.
3. Support the planting of pollinator gardens in both urban and rural environments
  - a. Educate residents on native, blooming plants and trees that can nourish pollinators and assist with population rebound.
  - b. Define what constitutes a pollinator garden vs an unkempt lawn and encourage/allow pollinator gardens without the risk of receiving a fine.
  - c. Connect with garden walks to promote the gardens who have planted with nature in mind such as using a majority of native and pollinator friendly plantings, as well as any of those who have certified their gardens with NWF.
  - d. Connect with community gardens, focusing on environmental justice neighborhoods, to enhance success of existing efforts.
4. Support the planting of native plants in both urban and rural environments
  - a. Educate residents on native, blooming plants and trees and which plants would be best suited for the conditions present in the planting area. A good resource would be the WNY Native Plant Collaborative: <https://www.wnynativeplants.org/>
  - b. Work with nurseries and garden stores to have a large, diverse native plant section making the purchasing of native plants easy for consumers.
    - i. List of invasives species that nurseries cannot sell
    - ii. Organizations to supply, provide and sell plants (ie. Grassroots Gardens, Mass Ave Project, other urban farms with Ag & Markets Greenhouse licenses)
  - c. Create a website or database where people can educate themselves about and shop for native plants. A good resource for WNY native plants: <https://www.wnynativeplants.org/native-plants.html>
5. Combating invasive species to promote biodiversity

- a. Increase education as to how to identify a plant species to prevent accidental planting and cultivation of that species.
  - b. Use natural, non pesticide, ways of eradicating invasive species such as Lets Goat Buffalo or solarizing.
- 6. Education on residential lawn care.
  - a. Reducing pesticide and fertilizer use
  - b. Erie County Healthy Lawn Initiative  
<https://www3.erie.gov/environment/healthy-lawns>