

What You Can Do to Help Wildlife and Plants

When most people hear the term endangered species, they think of manatees, grizzly bears, whales, and other charismatic species. If these creatures don't live in your area, you might think there is nothing you can do to help endangered species. However, the current endangered species list contains almost 1300 plants, birds, fish, mammals and other species that might live or migrate through your area. Private citizens can play a critical role in protecting our country's wildlife and plants. Pulling invasive weeds that are forcing out native plants, rebuilding crumbling river banks, planting native trees — these are things we all can do to help improve our lands so that they are a better place to live for wildlife and humans. All endangered and threatened species need your help, from the familiar and famous species, like the gray wolf, to the lesser-known but equally important species, such as the Karner blue butterfly and western lily. Here's how you can make a difference:

In your community

To learn about ways you can assist native wildlife in your area, contact your local U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) office — <http://offices.fws.gov/> or your local natural heritage program or conservation data center — <http://www.natureserve.org>

Volunteer at your local wildlife refuge — <http://volunteers.fws.gov/volunteers.html>

Join a local or national conservation association.

Support natural areas and nature centers near you; work with other community members to maintain and restore local habitat. Contact your state or local fish and game office to learn how you can become involved in local community wildlife preservation efforts — <http://offices.fws.gov/statelinks.html>

Walk, ride your bike, carpool or use public transportation when possible.

Don't litter.

If you observe evidence of wildlife poaching, please contact your state fish and game office — <http://offices.fws.gov/statelinks.html> State agencies handle violations of state wildlife laws and have jurisdiction over most local wildlife management issues.

Know your fishing and hunting laws and follow them closely when you hunt or fish. Individual state, territorial, and tribal agencies sell recreational fishing and hunting licenses, and are the best source of information regarding hunting and fishing seasons, local regulations and areas that are open or closed to hunting and fishing — <http://offices.fws.gov/statelinks.html>

At home

Don't put hazardous substances down your drain or in the trash. Things like paint thinner, furniture polish, and antifreeze can pollute our water or land, impacting people as well as wildlife. For information on how to dispose of hazardous material properly, check out EPA's guide to safe management of household hazardous waste — <http://www.epa.gov/epaoswer/non-hw/household/hhw.htm>

Keep litter, pet wastes, and leaves out of street gutters and storm drains. These outlets drain directly into lakes, streams, rivers and wetlands. Pet wastes contain bacteria and viruses that can threaten fish, wildlife, and people.

Keep your cat indoors. Roaming house cats do tremendous amounts of damage to birds and other wildlife such as field mice, frogs, squirrels and lizards. Putting a bell on your cat helps; keeping it inside is the best thing you can do.



A young volunteer helps plant white cedar seedlings as part of a habitat restoration project. USFWS photo

Take unwanted, re-usable items to a charitable organization or thrift shop.

Recycle everything you can: newspapers, scrap papers, cans, glass, motor oil, plastics, appliances, etc.

Don't leave water running. Turn off the tap when brushing your teeth or washing your face. Install water-saving devices such as low-flow showerheads which will save water and save you money.

Turn the lights and TV off when you're out of the room.

Use cloth, not paper, napkins.

Write to companies that send unwanted junk mail and ask them to take you off their list.

In your yard or neighborhood park

To get more information on how you can collaborate with the FWS to restore wetlands and other important fish and wildlife habitats on your own property, check out the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program — <http://www.fws.gov/landowner.html>

Plant native trees and bushes with berries or nuts that provide birds and other creatures with both places to live and something to eat. To learn how you can make your backyard wildlife-friendly, check out the National Wildlife Federation's Backyard Wildlife Habitat program — <http://www.nwf.org/habitats/> Contact your County Cooperative Extension Service or local native plant society for help in identifying native plants. Native species adapted to local climate conditions require less water and care to flourish.

Put bird feeders and other wildlife attractants, such as bird houses and baths, in your yard. (Birds can usually find enough food, but adequate water is hard to find.)

Learn about natural insect controls as alternatives to pesticides. For more information on this method of pest control and other EPA-recommended ways to make your lawn environmentally friendly, visit — <http://www.epa.gov/oppfead1/Publications/lawncare.pdf>

Pull weeds instead of using herbicides.

Grow plants that are natural insect repellents, such as lemon balm, among your flowers and vegetables to help keep unwanted insects away.

If you use fertilizer, calibrate your applicator to make sure you apply the correct amount. Fertilizing more than the recommended rate does not help plants grow better and often harms them. In addition, excess fertilizer will likely wash into streams and rivers and may lead to amphibian deformities and deaths.

Buy or make your own backyard composter for your food waste products like coffee grounds, vegetables, fruit or other non-animal products. Compost is a natural fertilizer that enriches your soil. It is especially good for vegetable gardens. For more information on how to make your own compost, visit — http://www.hdra.org.uk/gh_comp.htm

Plant a butterfly garden. To get started, visit the North American Butterfly Association's website — <http://www.naba.org/pubs/bgh.html>

If you must use pesticides, herbicides or fungicides, don't throw leftovers in the trash, down your drain or into a storm sewer; dispose of them properly. Visit the Natural Resource Conservation Service's Backyard Conservation website for pesticide disposal information and other environmental lawn and garden care tips — <http://www.nhq.nrcs.usda.gov/CCS/Backyard.html>

On vacation

Turn the heat down and turn off the water heater before you leave your home.

Don't pick flowers or collect wild creatures for pets. Leave animals and plants where you find them.

Going abroad? Think twice about the things you buy. Travelers don't realize that several U.S. laws and an international treaty make it a crime to bring many wildlife souvenirs into our country. To learn more about these laws and what products are illegal to import into the U.S., visit the U.S. Fish and Wildlife "Buyer Beware!" page — <http://refuges.southeast.fws.gov/le/lebuyer.html>

When possible, use bug spray that does not contain DEET, which is extremely harmful to amphibians like frogs and salamanders.

In your classroom

Ask your teachers to help you organize clean up days. Remove trash or invasive weeds from vacant lots or streams. Replant eroding river banks with native trees that will stabilize the soil and reduce the amount of dirt going into the river. This will not only improve the quality of water for fish and humans, it will provide habitat for birds and mammals.

Plant a garden on your school grounds to attract wildlife, birds, and butterflies. Build homes for bats and birds, and have the project certified by National Wildlife Federation's Backyard Wildlife Habitat program — <http://www.nwf.org/habitats/>

Hold a school Arbor Day native tree planting. Invite local officials. Visit the National Arbor Day Foundation's website — <http://www.arborday.org/>

There is a growing number of local freshwater fishes whose existence is threatened by unhealthy rivers and streams. Grants are available to teachers for raising and breeding these fish — <http://www.troutintheclassroom.com/>

Explore nature in your neighborhood by celebrating National Wildlife Week at your school. For more information, visit the National Wildlife Federation's website — <http://www.nwf.org/nationalwildlifeweek/>

When you're shopping

Only buy rare or "exotic" pets from pet stores that can provide paperwork to demonstrate the legal status of the animal. Some rare or exotic pets may have been smuggled into the country or taken from their natural habitat.

Don't buy products that come from endangered and threatened plant and animal species.

In your car

Don't throw cigarettes or trash out your window. Cigarettes cause thousands of forest fires every year. Food trash along road sides attracts animals which then can be killed by cars.

Turn off your engine even for short stops. One minute of idling uses more fuel than re-starting your engine.

Recycle your engine oil. Contact your local Solid Waste Management Office to find out where you can recycle your oil.

Keep engines well-tuned and tires properly inflated to maximize fuel efficiency.

Consider a career in conservation!

Join the thousands of dedicated men and women who are working to protect wildlife and plants here in the U.S. and around the world. For more information on career opportunities, visit — http://hr.fws.gov/Careers_FWS.htm

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