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New Agreement Helps Eastern New York Landowners Protect Endangered Butterflies

Eastern New York landowners will have help protecting habitat for endangered Karner blue butterflies and two more protected butterflies in an innovative program announced today that balances endangered species habitat protection and private land management.

The Safe Harbor Program for Karner Blue Butterflies is a partnership between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, The Nature Conservancy, and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. Only the second of its kind in the Northeast and the 80th nationwide, this program encourages private landowners in portions of Albany, Saratoga, Schenectady and Warren counties to manage their lands to protect and enhance habitat for Karner blue butterflies.

Other rare species share the same kind of habitat and may also benefit from this program, including two state-protected butterflies, the frosted elfin and the Persius duskywing, that also feed on the wild blue lupine plants required for Karner blue survival.

When a landowner signs up for the program, The Nature Conservancy, which will manage the program, will identify as “baseline” the acreage of Karner blue butterfly habitat present at that time. Even if the landowner’s management increases the amount of Karner blue habitat, at the end of the agreement period the landowner will only be responsible for protecting the original baseline acreage, and not the additional butterfly habitat that resulted from the landowner’s good management.

“Partnerships with private landowners are critical to recovering imperiled populations of the Karner blue butterfly,” said David Stilwell, field supervisor for the Service’s New York Field Office based in Cortland. “Offering landowners assurances that their good conservation work will not result in new land use restrictions is an important step forward.”

“The Safe Harbor program is an innovative approach that lets landowners play a critical role in the conservation of endangered species while addressing their concerns over potential land use restrictions,” says Mark King, The Nature Conservancy’s Director of Protection Programs. “By promoting the implementation of beneficial management actions for endangered species, Safe Harbor Agreements will reduce the concerns of

landowners adjacent to restoration sites and offer a new way for land owners to participate in the restoration of threatened species habitat. The Nature Conservancy is pleased to be working in partnership with state and federal agencies on this program.”

DEC Assistant Commissioner for Natural Resources Christopher A. Amato said, “Participation of private landowners in the protection and promotion of the Karner blue butterfly habitat will be essential to successful recovery of this species. For years, The Nature Conservancy and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service have been an important partner in restoration efforts for the Karner blue. We look forward to extending this partnership through them to the wider public via the Safe Harbor Program.”

This program is patterned after 79 Safe Harbor Programs across the country with more than 400 landowners enrolled to protect 75 species.

The tiny Karner blue butterfly’s wingspan measures only 1 inch across. The male has a silvery or dark blue topside, while the female is grayish brown to blue on the topside with a border of orange crescents along the lower edge of the hindwing. Both sexes have a row of orange crescents on the borders of the undersides of the wings.

Adult Karner blue butterflies feed on the nectar of flowering plants. As a caterpillar, the species feeds only on wild blue lupine leaves. This narrow habitat requirement severely restricts where the Karner blue can survive. Though most widespread in Wisconsin, it is found in portions of Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, New Hampshire, New York and Ohio. Several areas of New York once supported Karner blues, but they currently persist only in the Albany Pine Bush and portions of Saratoga and Warren counties. A restored population exists in the Concord Pine Barrens of New Hampshire.

For more information or to sign up for the program, contact Mark King, Director of Protection Programs at the New York State Office of The Nature Conservancy, at 518-690-7840.

The DEC website has additional information about Karner blue butterflies in New York at <http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/56119.html> (including a link to video of the Karner blue) and <http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/7118.html>.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service works with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and a trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals, and commitment to public service. For more information about our work and the people who make it happen, visit <http://www.fws.gov>.

The Nature Conservancy is a leading conservation organization working around the world to protect ecologically important lands and waters for nature and people. To

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