

More Help for Monarchs

By Dan Ashe, Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

I spent much of the morning on August 20 at beautiful [Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge](#) with Senator Amy Klobuchar working on monarch butterfly conservation. Life is good!

Senator Klobuchar is an exceptional advocate for monarchs in Congress, and it is stirring to hear the passion she has for them. As a bonus: We had plenty of kids with us, ready to become monarch scientists and add to our data on the butterfly.

By now, I think a lot of people know that time is running out to secure the [future of the monarch butterfly](#), one of North America's most recognizable wildlife species.

As recently as 1996, the estimated population of monarchs wintering in Mexico topped 1 billion. This year, the Mexican overwintering population numbered only about 56.5 million butterflies.

Some of the problem has been blamed on timber harvesting in Mexico, climate change and disease – and we must address those factors – but the accelerating conversion of native prairie habitat in Midwestern states to crop production and livestock grazing has hurt the monarch and other pollinators.

Working with partners – such as the [Monarch Joint Venture](#), [the National Wildlife Federation](#) and [the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation](#) – we're seeking to restore and enhance more than 200,000 acres of habitat for monarchs on public and private lands this year, while also supporting more than 750 schoolyard habitat projects and pollinator gardens nationwide. We're also reaching out to our counterparts in Canada and Mexico to work together to save this North American insect. But we can do more.

That's why I'm proud to announce we have committed to spending \$4 million starting in October to support partnership-driven, landscape-scale monarch conservation projects. This funding will enable us to focus with our partners on conserving breeding and migration habitat in priority areas.

These places include spring breeding areas in Texas and Oklahoma, summer breeding habitat in Minnesota and other Midwest Corn Belt states, and areas west of the Rockies important for the western monarch population.

We'll also expand work with partners to increase the availability of seed for native milkweed and nectar plants; education and outreach programs; and other large-scale efforts across multiple geographies.

Why all the attention on monarchs? It's not just because they're beautiful, an integral part of North America's wildlife, and representative of other pollinators.

The monarch is also the perfect species to introduce kids to conservation and help them develop a love for nature. Few other beloved, well-known species thrive in backyards like monarchs when the right habitat is created for them.

I've planted native milkweed with kids across the nation this year. To see the smiles on their faces as they dig in the dirt is incredibly uplifting.

Together, we can ensure that the monarch continues to be seen and enjoyed across the nation's landscape. I'm optimistic we will succeed.

Cutline:

Include nectar plants and milkweed in your gardens to help reverse the loss of breeding habitat for monarch butterflies in the U.S. Photo by Giuseppina Croce