USDA United States Department of Agriculture

Honey Bee Pollinator Initiative (HBPI)

Honey Bees and Beekeeping

The Honey Bee (Apis mellifera) is widely used in North America for its pollinating services. Although humans have had a long association with honey bees, humans have not "domesticated" the honey bee like typical livestock. Beekeeping requires skill and knowledge of bee and colony biology.

Why are Honey Bees Declining?

There are 50 percent fewer honey bee hives than in 1950 and the number continues to decline. This is due to issues such as pests, disease, the use of herbicides and insecticides, and decreasing habitat.

Honey Bees in Montana

Honey bees and bee hives can be found in all counties in Montana. However, hives are not stationary. Most honey bees are utilized for honey production during the spring, summer and fall. Hives are then moved both in state and around the country for pollinator services.

Where am I Most Likely to see Honey Bees?

The honey bee is closely associated with "bee pastures." A bee pasture is any grassy cover that contains suitable flowering plants for honey bee forage (nectar or pollen). Beekeepers typically place bee hives (stacks of boxes the honey bee uses for a home) in grassy areas within 3 miles of high quality "bee pasture "or conservation areas such as Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) lands.

What are the Threats?

- Loss of foraging habitat (bee pastures) to cultivated crops.
- Loss of foraging plants within bee pastures due to poor management (grasses take over and wildflowers cannot compete).
- Honey bee mortality due to a lack of Integrated Pest Management.

What are the Opportunities to create or improve honey bee habitat?

- Establish preferred wild foraging plants.
- Establish preferred cultivated foraging plants.
- Implement Integrated Pest Management.
- Implement managed grazing systems that maximize high quality Honey Bee forage, such as purple prairie clover and lacy phacelia.
- Create block plantings that are a minimum of 125 to 250 feet wide or more.

What specific actions can landowners take to improve honey bee habitat?

Maintain and Improve Healthy Grazing Lands

- Grass-based grazing sustains honey bee forage plants. Practices such as interseeding a diverse mix of preferred honey bee forages provide high quality forage for both bees and livestock.

For More Information

To learn more, contact your local NRCS office, or go to www.mt.nrcs.usda.gov.

- The NRCS can help develop a grazing system that increases plant health and forage production while providing preferred honey bee forage during the time of need.
- Graze after the bloom period is over.

Establish/Enhance Forage for Honey Bees

- Establish bee forage or enhance grassy cover in non-cropland areas.
- Convert cropland to a preferred, diverse mix of forbs (wildflowers) to provide honey bee forage within one mile of a hive.
- Establish forages near a water source such as a creek, lake, pond, or water facility.
- Interseed preferred forbs and legumes into existing grassy cover provides honey bee forage if it is within one mile of a hive.
- NRCS can help develop a prairie restoration plan that includes livestock forage and bird habitat in addition to high quality bee forage.
- Flowering cover crops may provide honey bee forage within one mile of a hive. Allow the cover crop to persist during the during the full bloom period.

Implement Integrated Pest Management (IPM)

- Since pesticides may drift onto adjacent habitat, all agricultural producers play an important role in honey bee protection and conservation, not just growers of fruits, berries, seeds, and nuts. Managed honey bees cannot always be moved out of agricultural areas to protect them from pesticide applications.
- IPM uses least hazardous pest management options and only when there is a demonstrated need. Special precautions can reduce hazards to bees, people, and the environment.
- The NRCS, in collaboration with IPM specialists, can help you identify potential pesticide hazards to honey bees, incorporate honey bee protection into IPM plans, and help you prevent or mitigate identified hazards to honey bees. Good pest management reduces conditions that favor pests, establishes an economic threshold of how much damage can be tolerated before using pesticides, establishes a system to monitor pest populations, controls pests with the most specific pest control option when the damage threshold is reached, provides a barrier to safe forage sources by planting buffers between cropland and pollinator plantings to reduce effects of drift, and more.

Financial Assistance

NRCS may provide financial assistance to landowners for practices that improve honey bee forages, including:

The Core Practices

- Conservation Cover
- Field Border
- Riparian Herbaceous Cover
- Forage Harvest Management
- Forage and Biomass Plantings
- Prescribed Grazing
- Range Planting
- Tree/Shrub Establishment
- Upland Wildlife Habitat Management
- Early Successional Habitat Development

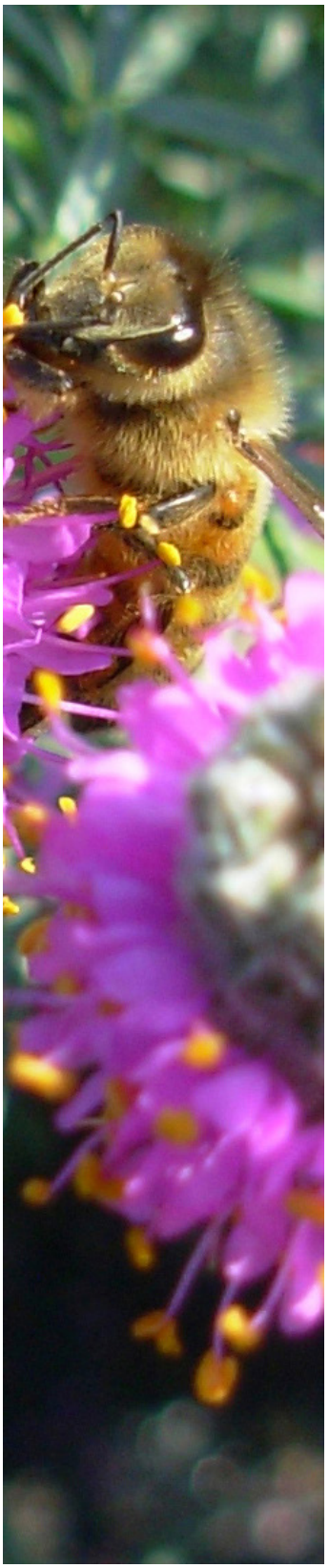
The Supporting Practices in Montana:

- Herbaceous Weed Control
- Conservation Crop Rotation
- Windbreak/Shelterbelt Establishment
- Fence
- Riparian Forest Buffer
- Mulching
- Tree/Shrub Site Preparation
- Livestock Pipeline
- Pumping Plant
- Integrated Pest Management
- Watering Facility
- Water Well
- Forest Trails and Landings
- Forest Stand Improvement

Note: Supporting practices are available to support selected core practices that have been proven to provide a benefit to the honey bee and hive health.

Participation in HBPI

If you have agricultural lands that are within a mile of a documented apiary (a group of 5 or more hives) and are interested in improving honey bee habitat within that area utilizing one or more of the practices listed above you must submit an application for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program.



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