INDIANA NRCS CONSERVATION SHOWCASE

United States Department of Agriculture - Natural Resources Conservation Service

Helping People...

...Help the Land.

USDA United States Department of Agriculture

Pollinator Group wins National Earth Team Volunteer Award

Three-fourths of the world's flowering plants and about 35 percent of the world's food crops depend on animal pollinators to reproduce. More than 3,500 species of native bees help increase crop yields. Some scientists estimate that one out of every three bites of food we eat exists because of animal pollinators like bees, butterflies and moths, birds and bats, and beetles and other insects.

Bees are disappearing, bats are dying and the monarch butterfly populations have decreased significantly over the past two decades. These and other animal pollinators face many challenges in the modern world. Habitat loss, disease, parasites, and environmental contaminants have all contributed to the decline of many species of pollinators.

Because of the national concern of declining bee and butterfly populations the Jennings County Soil and Water Conservation District formed a pollinator sub-committee in 2015. The mission of this committee is to educate the community about the importance of pollinators through involvement and creation of new habitat throughout Jennings County. The project has three goals:

1. Inform the community about the declining populations of pollinators.
2. Educate the community of the importance of pollinators.
3. Apply action in the form of creating new habitats and enhancing existing habitats.

The first meeting was held in July 2015 with seven members, after a year that committee has grown to twenty members. The committee is a partnership of agencies and volunteers including 11 Earth Team Volunteers, NRCS, U.S. Fish and Wildlife, Purdue Extension, SWCD staff and supervisors, School Administrators, and the Department of Natural Resources.

In a very short amount of time, this group has:

- Helped install pollinator habitats at 20 public locations such as schools, parks and state lands and in over 150 private home gardens;
- Sold nearly 3,000 native potted plants;
- Worked with the local farmers market to distribute free pollinator seeds;
- Educated over 500 adults and children about the importance of pollinators; and
- Constructed a pollinator pathway at the Jennings County Fair Grounds

This project also supports the mission of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Monarch Initiative in which special Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) and Wetland Reserve Easement (WRE) funding has been allocated for creating pollinator habitat throughout Indiana.

It is very important to recognize the amount of volunteer time that was needed to be successful with such a huge endeavor. In addition to the many partnership staff hours dedicated to this program, eleven (11) Earth Team volunteers donated more than 360 hours to the project. In total, the conservation partnership has put 2,370 hours into this effort so far.

In 2016, the efforts of this group did not go unnoticed. They won the National NRCS Earth Team Volunteer Partnership award. This prestigious award is presented by the National NRCS office to the most effective volunteer partnership that demonstrates shared leadership among the partnering organization, NRCS employees and Earth Team volunteers – in the nation. This parntership competed against groups from all 50 states, and demonstrated the extraordinary efforts that volunteer conservation partnerships are capable of accomplishing.

They are looking to expanding the project area to include:

- Working with Ripley and Franklin County SWCDs to create more habitat
- Working with the US Army to create new habitat within Camp Atterbury
- Create new habitat in local parks within Jennings County
- Plant forbs at the new nature park in downtown North Vernon
- Plant fifteen more acres of forb habitat on public school property

As more counties and entities join their efforts and generate their own projects, there will be additional opportunities for Earth Team volunteers to become involved in creating and restoring more habitat on a regional basis. Looking at the big picture, they hope to see pollinator populations increasing and assist in keeping the Great Monarch migration around for future generations.