



# The Patch

*Center for Pollinator Conservation*  
Quarterly newsletter

## May 2026

### Message from the Director

Recently, the Center hosted an in-person meeting to explore agency strategies for sustaining monarch and pollinator conservation initiatives. During the gathering, participants reviewed the Center's pivotal role and discussed actionable steps to advance monarch and pollinator conservation. Actions include reaffirming commitments to monarch conservation, strengthening partnerships and identifying new collaborative science opportunities. The group agreed to prioritize habitat restoration, enhanced communication efforts and fostering a connected Center identity to maximize conservation impact across regions.

Our collective efforts—from advancing eDNA for bumble bees, monarch butterfly tracking technologies, to expanding voluntary conservation agreements and modernizing pollinator data—are connecting communities and elevating science-driven stewardship. Together, we are moving forward on the Service Seven and aligning with Department of the Interior's priorities to build strong relationships, deliver real benefits and increase innovation for lasting impact.

This field season, I encourage everyone to recognize how pollinator conservation is woven throughout your and the work of the agency. Whether you're in the field, at the office or interacting with partners and communities, take a moment to observe the vital role pollinators play in the landscapes we manage and the broader benefits they bring to our conservation mission. Their presence and resilience are a testament to our commitment and the positive impact of our collaborative efforts.

As we approach Pollinator Week, June 22–28, let's celebrate pollinators and their habitats together. Be sure to watch our website and social media accounts for updates, stories and ways to participate in the festivities. Pollinator Week is a wonderful opportunity to learn, share and inspire others about the importance of pollinator host plants and the incredible work you make happen.

If you are interested in sharing more details about your efforts, consider engaging in the Pollinator Community of Practice. [Email the Pollinator CoP chairs with your interest.](#)

Thank you for your dedication and commitment to caring for pollinators and their habitats.

-Nicole Alt

# Center for Pollinator Conservation Investments

## Applied Science

- This spring, we expanded our collaboration with Monarch Joint Venture's remote sensing program through a series of unmanned aerial vehicle habitat surveys in Texas, which is an essential region along the monarch migration corridor. A two-person team surveyed hundreds of acres from north of Dallas to south of Austin, collecting imagery and ecological data that will advance our ability to assess habitat quality and identify native milkweed species beyond the Midwest-focused models developed to date. Surveys are timed to capture peak visibility of *Asclepias viridis* in the north and *A. asperula* farther south. The team also established field validation plots to compare the aerial survey imagery estimates with on-the-ground stem counts. And, the next phase of the project is already underway, with data collection shifting to private ranchlands in New Mexico in partnership with the Western Landowners Alliance.



Milkweed remote sensing being conducted next to a soybean field. Photo courtesy of Wendy Caldweel/ Monarch Joint Venture.

- In April, our paper on the development and application of the [Franklin's bumble bee eDNA essay was published in the journal Genome](#). This project has been in development for more than five years in partnership with the U.S. Geological Survey and support from dozens of volunteers and students. We have field samples from 2025 awaiting analysis and hope to collect more samples this year, with a focus on higher elevation and new remote habitats. We are also working on a publication detailing similar work with eDNA and Western bumble bee, as well as a paper reviewing the state of the science around pollinator eDNA that would complete a task from the 2024 eDNA workshop in Chicago. If you find a Franklin's bumble bee, email Jeff Evertt at [jeff\\_evertt@fws.gov](mailto:jeff_evertt@fws.gov).



A Western bumble bee nest that was excavated from an alpine meadow in the Cascade Mountains in Oregon. Photo by Alan Yanahan/USFWS.

- Most North American bumble bees nest underground in abandoned rodent burrows or similar spaces, but the process queens use to select these sites remains unclear. Learning more about their nesting behavior would help us better protect important habitat. In the central Cascades of Oregon, our team is searching for Western bumble bee nests using tools like radio telemetry. Over the past few years, we located three nests near Detroit Lake, monitored them through the season, and then excavated the nests for analysis at Oregon State University's pollinator health lab. The lab is measuring and studying each nest, and we expect to publish findings soon. [Because Western bumble bees are closely related to rusty patched bumble bees, you can also explore our published nest study](#). If you find a rusty patch bumble bee nest, email Tam Smith at [tamara\\_smith@fws.gov](mailto:tamara_smith@fws.gov).

# Center for Pollinator Conservation Investments

## Applied Science

- In collaboration with US Geological Survey, the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, Xerces Society, Monarch Joint Venture and the Center are co-leading a working group on monarch movement ecology and tracking. The goal of this newly formed group is to bring together federal, state and academic partners to identify research priorities, synthesize emerging data on monarch butterfly movements and to answer questions that will support recovery. The group is also developing targets for various geographies, including California, Texas and Florida. This will help illuminate previously unknown information about monarch survival, migration pathways and connectivity between populations. You can follow along in real-time to track radio tagged monarchs on the Project Monarch app.

The Bluetooth enabled radio tags have many other possible uses and are beginning to be tested. For example, the Center is working with researcher Elaine Evans at the University of Minnesota's Bee Lab to test the ability of BlūMorpho tags with bumble bee nest searching. Bumble bee nests are notoriously difficult to find. [Check out the Nest Quest community science project if you want to get involved.](#)

## Collaboration

- The new report, [Conservation Priorities for Western Monarchs in California](#), represents the culmination of a multi-year effort by 13 state and federal partners to review and refine priorities from the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies' [50-Year Western Monarch Conservation Plan](#) and the Western Monarch Summit Priorities. Together, these efforts identify key actions for agency partners and opportunities for researchers, land managers and the public to help protect the western monarch population.



Management of California's overwintering sites for monarchs are a conservation priority. Photo by Joanna Gilkeson/USFWS.



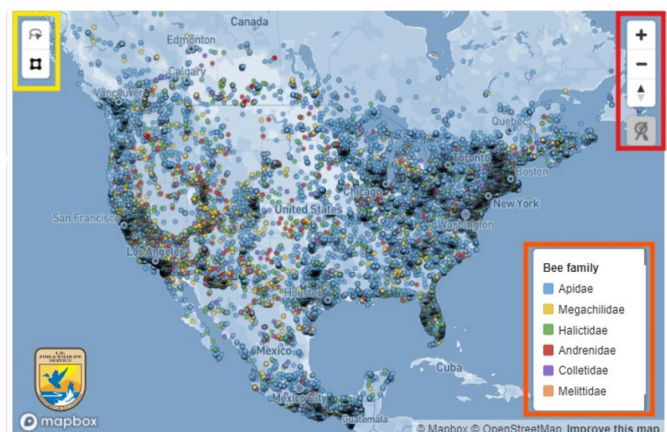
### Conservation Priorities for Western Monarchs in California • 2026

This report supports voluntary, science-based conservation in California that advance monarch conservation. Photo courtesy of WAFA.

# Center for Pollinator Conservation Investments

## Collaboration

- The University of Illinois-Chicago announced its 100th enrollee of the [Nationwide Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances for the Monarch Butterfly on Energy and Transportation Lands, or Monarch CCAA](#). To date, 50 energy companies, 14 state departments of transportation and seven counties across the U.S. have voluntarily committed to create and manage habitats for the monarch butterfly on energy and transportation lands. With current partnership commitments, approximately 1.3 million acres are managed as monarch habitat across 44 states.
- [The University of Illinois-Chicago also is accepting applications for the Bumble Bee Conservation Benefit Agreement on Energy and Transportation Lands](#) for listed and at-risk bumble bee species. This effort was borne out of the early success of the Monarch CCAA and incorporates many of the same elements, partners and methodologies, with some distinct differences due to bumble bee ecology and the new Conservation Benefit Agreement structure and ESA Section 10 regulation updates. This voluntary agreement implements conservation actions on working lands and avoids project delays without additional regulatory requirements for the 11 bumble bee species covered under the agreement.
- The Center working alongside five specialized partners is accelerating adaptive management and restoration of early-season milkweed in the western monarch breeding zone. This collaborative effort ensures monarchs have immediate access to vital native milkweed species as they leave overwintering sites, preventing mismatches between butterfly activity and host plant availability. Together, the team has mapped milkweed habitats, collected seeds for future restoration, studied monarch interactions with natural stands, sampled for pesticide impacts and tested habitat restoration techniques. These coordinated actions are streamlining knowledge and capacity to reestablish native, early-blooming milkweed across the western landscape.
- The Center continues its strong collaboration with our agency's Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program, investing more than half a million dollars in 2026 to support ten high-impact projects across twelve states. Projects range from developing regionally adapted post-fire seed mixes in the Pacific Northwest, expanding tribal native plant nursery capacity in New Mexico, creating a pollinator-rich prairie network in central Illinois, to restoring wetland-dependent pollinator habitat in Arkansas. These projects reaffirm and amplify the Center's commitment and reinforce our mission-driven focus that conservation of pollinators is woven into everything our agency does, even when it is not the primary focus of the work.
- [The North American Bee Distribution Tool](#) offers a comprehensive, user-friendly way for you to assess bee species richness and prioritize conservation efforts across the lands you manage. Managed by the Center, it integrates species occurrence data and conservation status rankings to guide effective conservation strategies.



# Center for Pollinator Conservation Investments

## Engagement



Pollinator habitat blooming along a petroleum pipeline. Photo by Mara Koenig/USFWS.

- On May 6, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director Brian Nesvik, Center executive leadership and other bureau staff attended an American Petroleum Institute’s Midstream event at Falcon Pipeline in Hookstown, Pennsylvania. This event showcased how a midstream operator is evolving its right-of-way stewardship through innovative land management practices, including conservation-based techniques, as platforms for strengthened stakeholder engagement. Multiple state, NGO and industry representatives, including National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Foundation for America’s Public Lands, Pheasants Forever, Conservation Fund, Bureau of Land Management, Army Corps of Engineers, Exxon Mobil, Shell and others were in

attendance. [Learn more about how we are working with to fuel pollinator conservation.](#)

- The Midwest Landscape Initiative has stood up a Grasslands Working Group to carry forward conversations from the 2024 Midwest Grasslands Summit, which Center staff attended. Federal, state and NGO partners meet monthly to discuss synergies at multiple geographic scales that ultimately result in increased, functional grasslands.

## Inventory and Monitoring, Natural Resources Program Center

- The National Wildlife Refuge System Inventory and Monitoring Team released the first-ever [Pollinator Inventory and Monitoring Strategic Plan](#), a five-year roadmap designed to strengthen science-based adaptive management and conservation delivery for pollinators across the refuge system. This plan responds to growing needs for pollinator-specific inventory and monitoring priorities and provides a clear, coordinated framework for guiding future pollinator monitoring efforts.
- The Refuge Team published more than 600,000 wild bee and flower-visiting insect occurrence records to the [US Geological Survey Bee Lab GBIF dataset](#). This achievement demonstrates effective inter-agency collaboration and coordination by providing high-quality refuge data and ensuring adherence to contemporary data standards. Further, Data and Geospatial Resources biologist Hilola “Scarlett” Adham developed an independent R-based workflow that allows for efficient and precise publishing. This improvement enhances interoperability, speeds information access and strengthens how our data can inform adaptive management.
- The Refuge Team hosted a three-day training for two American Conservation Experience technicians supporting the Southeast Region Pollinator Project. Now in its third year, this project targets data-poor areas of the Southeast by surveying focal habitats aligned with regional conservation objectives. The technicians will conduct pollinator surveys at four Louisiana refuges, and their feedback on workflow practicality, standard operation procedure usability and data-management realities is strengthening future guidance.

## Center for Pollinator Conservation

*Conserving pollinators with you and for everyone.*

