



House Agriculture Committee Testimony on HB 1258

North Dakota Game and Fish Department
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Chairman Thomas and members of the House Agriculture Committee, my name is Greg Link. I serve as the Chief of the Conservation and Communications Division for the North Dakota Game and Fish Department (Department). I am providing informational testimony on HB 1258.

A pollinator is any animal that moves pollen from one part of a flower to another plant. Pollen fertilizes the plant, and only fertilized plants make seeds or fruit. Without pollination, plants cannot reproduce; subsequently, our food supply and habitat would be greatly diminished.

In North Dakota, our primary pollinators are insects such as native bees, butterflies and some moths. North Dakota has about 150 species of butterflies, more than 1,400 moths, and an unknown number of bee species (probably hundreds). Bats and birds, while important pollinators in other states, are not considered significant pollinators in North Dakota. Honeybees, although not native to North America, are vital agricultural pollinators in North Dakota.

Importance of Native Pollinators to Society and Natural World

- 75-85% of flowering plants rely on an animal to move pollen
- Insect pollination accounts for approximately \$18 to \$27 billion annually in the United States
- Of 107 leading crops, 70 rely moderately to entirely on pollinating insects; 43 of these rely highly-entirely on insect pollinators (meaning 40-100% reduction of crop yield if insects aren't available to pollinate). Examples include apples, cherries, cucumbers, avocados, and almonds
- One in three bites of food taken in the U.S. can be attributed to pollinators
- Many vitamins and minerals we depend on come from insect pollinated plants, such as Vitamin C and Vitamin A
- Plants that rely on insect pollinators also increase carbon sequestration and prevent soil erosion
- Insect pollinators are food for other wildlife, such as our upland game birds

Department's Role/Responsibility in Managing Native Wild Pollinator Species

Provided in NDCC Chapter 20.1, **all wildlife** (all species and classifications) within the state, belong to the state and, ultimately, the ND Game and Fish Director and this Department are responsible for managing and conserving this public resource. NDCC 20.1 also defines “non-game wildlife” and the Department’s responsibility for “preservation, inventory, perpetuation, and conservation” of these species, as well. Therefore, all wildlife... mammals, birds, fish, amphibians, reptiles, mollusks, and insects, including our wild, native pollinator species... fall within our mission “to protect, conserve, and enhance fish and wildlife populations and their habitats for sustained consumptive and nonconsumptive use”.

What We've Been Doing

We can certainly relate and align with the intent of this bill. We'll be the first to admit we are far in arrears in knowing and understanding the status, health, and well-being of these important native insects. Here are just a few strategies and plans we're involved in which address aspects of HB1258:

- We've recently embarked on the 10-year update to our 2015 State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP), the state's blueprint document for managing and sustaining its rare, declining, and “At-Risk” species, which includes addressing many of the concerns outlined in this bill. Updating of this plan requires and includes gathering species information, getting input from species experts, determining statuses, identifying threats, developing strategic conservation measures, as well as identifying essential inventory or research work, etc. <https://gf.nd.gov/wildlife/swap>
- Our leadership, coordination, and collaborative involvement in developing the *North Dakota Monarch and Native Pollinator Strategy* <https://gf.nd.gov/gnf/conservation/docs/nd-monarch-butterfly-native-pollinator-strategy.pdf>
- Our financial contribution and involvement with ND Department of Agriculture and other stakeholder groups in the recently completed 4-yr pollinator research conducted by NDSU: *Monitoring Native Pollinator Communities throughout North Dakota: Status and Management Considerations for Species of Conservation Concern*
- Sustaining our native pollinators is an important component of the Meadowlark Initiative, our collaborative native grassland conservation strategy with other conservation, agriculture, and industry partners <https://gf.nd.gov/meadowlark-initiative>
- Our pollinator education and outreach efforts <https://gf.nd.gov/pollinators>
- Summation of our Department's pollinator efforts (see attached)

What We Know

Currently there are several pollinator insects in our state on US Fish and Wildlife Service's Threatened and Endangered list...and likely many more to come

- 1 Threatened (Dakota Skipper)
- 1 Endangered (Poweshiek Skipperling)
- 1 Candidate (Monarch butterfly)
- 5 petitioned (Regal Fritillary butterfly, Western Bumble Bee, Suckley's Cuckoo Bumble Bee, American Bumble Bee, and Variable Cuckoo Bumble Bee)
- The Midwest States finalized a list of Regional Species of Greatest Conservation Need which included 152 invertebrates (62 bees and butterflies)
- Many pollinator species are seeing rapid declines
 - Monarch butterfly
 - Regal Fritillary butterfly
 - Rusty-patched Bumble Bee
- 35% of North Dakota native bumble bees are at risk of extinction within the next 50 years (Bumble Bees of North America, IUCN data)
- Many stressors play into these declines: pesticides, parasites, non-native/invasive plants, climate change, insecticides, and habitat loss

What We Don't Know

- Very limited studies have been done in North Dakota.
- We don't know if many of the regional species of concern are even found in the state. If they are, we do not know if their populations are declining or stable.
- These species are likely impacted by several threats... however, we do not know to what extent each threat impacts each species.
- Some species might be declining due to habitat loss while another is experience losses due to high insecticide use

Closing "Take-Aways"

- Many of the Department's concerns and objectives are reflected in this bill.
- The cost of fulfilling the directives of this bill, however, would certainly surpass \$25,000. We would project the price tag to be in the millions rather than thousands.
- The Department's annual allocation of State Wildlife Grants dollars from the US Fish and Wildlife Service for addressing the conservation needs of 115 Species of

Conservation Priority identified in our 2015 State Wildlife Action Plan range from \$400-500K/annually.

- The Recovering America's Wildlife Act (RAWA) deliberated, but ultimately failed, in Congress would have brought approximately \$14 million dollars to ND for addressing conservation needs for our state's Species of Conservation Priority. These are the types of allocations necessary to address the concerns and conservation measures outline in this bill.
- If passed, the Department would certainly use its limited resources to collaborate with and further any efforts taken as directives of this bill

Thank you, Chairman and Committee Members, for your time and consideration of this testimony.