



## THE XERCES SOCIETY FOR INVERTEBRATE CONSERVATION

4828 Southeast Hawthorne Boulevard Portland, Oregon 97215, USA  
Telephone 503-232-6639 Fax 503-233-6794 [www.xerces.org](http://www.xerces.org)

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### Press Advisory

Contacts: Scott Hoffman Black: 503-449-3792 [sblack@xerces.org](mailto:sblack@xerces.org)  
Mace Vaughan: 503-753-6000 [mace@xerces.org](mailto:mace@xerces.org)

To: Reporters and Assignment Editors  
From: The Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation  
Date: May 7, 2007  
Re: Pollinators in Peril: Native bees can provide a safety net to farmers

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## Pollinators in Peril

### Widespread declines in honey bee colonies from colony collapse disorder

*Native bees can provide a safety net to farmers*

### Farm bill programs can provide incentives for pollinator conservation

The recent widespread losses of honey bee colonies from Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD) has received a lot of media coverage. At this time the cause of CCD remains a mystery. It may be one or more factors such as parasitic mites, disease, pesticides or diet. No matter what the cause of these declines, many scientists feel that native pollinators can be an insurance policy for honey bee scarcity.

The European honey bee is the most important single crop pollinator in the United States. However with the decline in the number of managed honey bee colonies from diseases, parasitic mites, and Africanized bees -- as well as from Colony Collapse Disorder - it is important to increase the use of native pollinators in our agricultural system.

"We've put all of our pollination eggs in the honeybee basket," says Mace Vaughan, conservation director of the Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation. "We need more baskets."

Hundreds of species of native bees are available for crop pollination. Research from

across the country demonstrates that a wide range of native bees help with crop pollination in some cases providing all of the pollination required. These free, unmanaged bees provide a valuable service, estimated recently by scientists from the Xerces Society and Cornell University to be worth \$3 billion annually in the U.S.

To improve crop security and the sustainability of agriculture, farmers in the United States need to diversify their pollinator portfolio said Scott Hoffman Black, executive director of the Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation. The 2007 Farm Bill could provide incentives to encourage farmers to improve habitat for these important pollinators.

### **Pollinators and the 2007 Farm Bill**

On October 18, 2006, the National Academy of Sciences released the report [Status of Pollinators in North America](#), which called attention to the decline of pollinators. Prepared by a National Research Council (NRC) committee, the report made several recommendations including urging the federal government to fund pollinator conservation through Farm Bill programs.

The 2002 Farm Bill includes several financial aid programs to help fund conservation on agricultural lands. Language on native pollinator conservation in the 2007 Farm Bill (due to be voted on this summer) would create incentives for farmers to protect, restore and enhance pollinator habitat in and around farms.

Fully integrating native pollinators into Farm Bill programs can have a wide impact. For example, the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) allocated over \$1 billion in financial and technical assistance to farmers in 2006, and the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) retired over 36 million acres of farmland, 4.5 million of which was specifically for wildlife habitat that could be tailored to provide greatest benefit for pollinators.

### **Importance of Protecting Native Pollinators**

Pollinators are essential to our environment. The ecological service they provide is important for the reproduction of nearly 75 percent of the world's flowering plants. This includes more than two-thirds of the world's crop species, and one in three mouthfuls of all the food we eat. The United States alone grows more than one hundred crops that either need or benefit from pollinators.

Beyond agriculture, native pollinators are keystone species in most terrestrial ecosystems. Fruits and seeds derived from insect pollination are a major part of the diet of approximately 25 percent of birds, and of mammals ranging from deer mice to grizzly bears.

Why are native bees so helpful? Collectively, native bees are more versatile than honey bees. Some species, such as mason bees, are active when conditions are too cold or wet

for honey bees. Many species also are simply more efficient at moving pollen between flowers. Bumble bees and several other native species can buzzpollinate flowers - vibrating the flower to release pollen from deep inside the anther - which honey bees cannot do. Crops such as tomatoes, cranberries, and blueberries produce larger, more abundant fruit when buzzpollinated.

### **The Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation**

The Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation is an international non-profit organization that protects the diversity of life through the conservation of invertebrates. The Society advocates for invertebrates and their habitats by working with scientists, land managers, educators, and citizens on conservation and education projects. Its core programs focus on endangered species, native pollinators, and watershed health.

For more information go to:

[http://www.xerces.org/Pollinator\\_Insect\\_Conservation/index.htm](http://www.xerces.org/Pollinator_Insect_Conservation/index.htm)