

April 14, 2014

President Barack Obama
The Honorable Tom Vilsack, Secretary of Agriculture
The Honorable Sally Jewell, Secretary of the Interior

Dear Mr. President, Mr. Secretary of Agriculture, and Madam Secretary of the Interior,

In light of the severe decline of both the eastern and western monarch butterfly populations that has occurred since the late-1990s, we are writing to ask you to establish a multi-agency monarch butterfly recovery initiative to restore the habitats that support the extraordinary migrations of this iconic species. We encourage you to direct the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Farm Service Agency (FSA), and Forest Service (USFS) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) of the U.S. Department of the Interior to develop a cooperative, landscape-level initiative with the many stakeholders willing to help foster significant monarch recovery.

These migrations can be saved for future generations by restoring to the landscape milkweeds, the host plants for monarch caterpillars, and nectar plants that sustain the adult butterflies. These habitats would support pollinators and a large number of other species as well. The federal agencies that incentivize conservation of wildlife habitat on private lands and that directly manage wildlife habitat on public lands can play key roles in this effort by targeting funding and technical support for such an initiative.

As you know, the eastern monarch population has been declining for more than a decade, and this year scientists observed the lowest numbers ever documented, representing a 90% drop from population numbers recorded in the mid-1990s. Since then, there has been a significant loss of milkweeds in agricultural areas of the Midwest, which is directly correlated with the declining monarch population. Monarch habitat has also declined sharply in the West.

A landscape-level monarch butterfly recovery initiative led by the NRCS and FSA on private lands would incentivize the planting of native milkweeds and butterfly nectar sources in places that are protected from pesticide and herbicide use.

A similar monarch recovery initiative on public lands, such as USFWS national wildlife refuges and on land managed by the USFS and BLM, would target the planting of tens of thousands of acres of native milkweeds and monarch butterfly nectar sources in areas where they occurred historically but are now absent.

We recommend that a monarch butterfly recovery initiative focus on two broad geographic regions of the United States that include the most important monarch breeding states: Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Kansas, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Missouri, Iowa, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan in the East; and California, Nevada, and Arizona in the West.

As monarch biologists, pollination ecologists, science educators, farmers and nonprofit leaders, we are grateful that the leaders of the United States, Mexico, and Canada have already pledged to work together to protect the monarch butterfly and its incredible migration as a symbol of international cooperation. We recognize that the population trends of the monarch butterfly can only be reversed through the collective actions of federal and state government agencies, private landowners, non-governmental organizations, land trusts, and other land managers.

The Monarch Joint Venture is an existing collaboration of federal and state agencies, university researchers, and conservation organizations that could support such a broader monarch butterfly recovery initiative. The current efforts of this partnership are guided by the North American Monarch Conservation Plan and directed by a steering committee made up of executives of partner organizations. Building on this partnership structure already in place, we are confident that such an initiative would gain immediate backing from many additional non-governmental organizations, universities, corporations, farmer organizations, and private landowners from south Texas to the Canadian border.

We wish to collaborate with you and support your agencies' efforts to establish an effective initiative for monarch butterfly recovery. We look forward to your response, and thank you in advance for your consideration.

Most Respectfully,

Gary Paul Nabhan, PhD
Make Way for Monarchs
Patagonia, AZ

Scott Hoffman Black, MS
Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation
Portland, OR

Karen Oberhauser, PhD
Monarch Joint Venture
University of MN
St. Paul, MN

Chip Taylor, PhD
Monarch Watch
University of Kansas
Lawrence, KS

Sonia Altizer, PhD
Project Monarch Health
University of Georgia

Athens, GA

Lincoln Brower, PhD
Sweet Briar College
Sweet Briar, VA

Stephen Buchmann, PhD
University of Arizona
Tucson, AZ

Laura Lopez-Hoffman, PhD
University of Arizona
Tucson, AZ

Steven Hopp, PhD
Emory and Henry College
Emory, VA

Laura Jackson, PhD
Tallgrass Prairie Center
Cedar Falls, IA

Bonnie L. Harper-Lore
Minnetonka, MN

Sarina Jepsen, MS
Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation
Portland, OR

Faisal Moola, PhD
David Suzuki Foundation
Toronto, Ontario, Canada

John Pleasants, PhD
Iowa State University,
Ames, IA

Diana Post, DVM
Rachel Carson Landmark Alliance
Silver Spring, MD

Doug Tallamy, PhD
University of Delaware,
Newark, DE

Mace Vaughan, MS
Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation
Portland, OR

Ernest Williams, PhD
Hamilton College
Clinton, NY

Farmers:

Jack L. Algieri
Four Seasons Farm
Stone Barns Center for Food and Agriculture
Pocantico Hills, NY

Nathalie and David Chambers
Madrona Farm
Victoria, BC, Canada

Scott Chaskey
Peconic Land Trust
Quail Hill Farm
Amagansett, NY

Tiffany Chan
Eden Place Nature Center
Chicago, IL

John and Nancy Hayden
The Farm Between
Jeffersonville, VT

Elizabeth Henderson
Peacework Organic Farms, CSA
Newark, NY

Michael Howard
Eden Place Nature Center
Chicago, IL

Paul Kaiser
Singing Frogs Farm

Sebastopol, CA

David Kline
Larksong Farm
Fredericksburg, OH

Kyle Kramer
Genesis Organic Farm
Saint Meinrad, IN

Loretta M. McGrath
Pollinator Partners
Farm to Table
Santa Fe, NM

Susan Preston Owen
FARM (Feed All Regardless of Means)
Original Mast General Store
Valle Crucis, NC

Educators, writers, nature artists, and natural resource NGO leaders:

Laurie Davis Adams
Pollinator Partnership
San Francisco, CA

Sara St. Antoine
Switzer Foundation Fellow
Cambridge, MA

Homero Aridjis
Grupo de los Cien
Michoacán, Mexico

Alison Bauer
Fairfax County Schools
Arlington, VA

Wendy Caldwell
Monarch Joint Venture
University of Minnesota
St. Paul, MN

Carol Davit
Missouri Prairie Foundation
Columbia, MO

Alison Hawthorne Deming
University of Arizona
Tucson, AZ

Betty Ferber,
Grupo de los Cien
Michoacán, Mexico

Ellen Gunter
Oak Park, IL

Nicole Hamilton
Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy
Leesburg, VA

Elizabeth Howard
Journey North
Norwich, VT

Elizabeth Hunter
Bakersville, NC

Barbara Kingsolver
Meadowview, VA

Paul Mirocha
Tumamoc Hill National Landmark
Tucson, AZ

Erik Mollenhauer
Monarch Teacher Network
Mullica Hill, NJ

Gail-Marie Morris
Southwest Monarch Study
Chandler, AZ

Trecia E. Neal
Fernbank Science Center
Atlanta, GA

Janisse Ray
University of Montana
Missoula, MT

Harriet Shugarman
Ridgewood, NJ

Bill Toone
ECOLIFE Foundation
Escondido, CA

Nina Veteto
Monarch Rescue
Asheville, NC

Ina Warren
Make Way for Monarchs
Brevard, NC

Cc:

John Holdren, Director of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy
Jason Weller, Chief of the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
Juan M. Garcia, Administrator of the USDA Farm Service Agency
Mike Schmidt, Deputy Administrator for Farm Programs, USDA Farm Service Agency
Tom Tidwell, Chief of USDA Forest Service
Neil Kornze, Principal Deputy Director of the USDI Bureau of Land Management
Daniel Ashe, Director of the US Fish and Wildlife Service
Jim Kurth, Chief of National Wildlife Refuge System, US Fish and Wildlife Service