

# What's on the Horizon for Minnesota Pollinators?

## 2019 Legislative Factsheet



### Pollinators are still struggling

Despite widespread public concern<sup>1</sup> and research attention, declines in pollinators and other insects are continuing at alarming rates. Last year, Minnesota honey beekeepers lost more than 50 percent of their bees, the second highest loss ever recorded in the state.<sup>2</sup> Many of Minnesota's 400+ species of native bees are also in distress—including the once-common rusty patched bumblebee, which was placed on the endangered species list in 2017.

These declines in the health and diversity of pollinators have consequences for Minnesota's agricultural economy and the state's wild plant communities. Pollinators are directly responsible for over \$60 million in state agricultural products, and the Minnesota Department of Agriculture estimates that hundreds of millions more—roughly 85% of the state's crops—may benefit from pollinators, both wild and managed.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the vast majority of the state's native plants depend on pollinators for seed set and survival.

### Luckily, Minnesotans have been working together

And we are on track to become the “comeback state” for pollinators. For the past several years, Minnesota has been a leader in addressing the current pollinator crisis—from habitat restoration efforts fostered by a strong native seed industry, to our strong grassroots advocacy network, to acclaimed research at the University of Minnesota (UMN), to the formation of the Governor's Committee on Pollinator Protection (GCPP) in 2016.

Last November, the GCPP released a final report with nearly 40 recommendations designed to protect and bolster pollinator populations across our state. These recommendations provide opportunities for all sectors of Minnesotans to step up. While not all proposals were endorsed by every member, several high priority legislative proposals received super-majority support. To see the full set of GCPP recommendations, go to <https://bit.ly/2GeWEpD>.

These recommendations have set the scene for an exciting 2019 legislative session, with more pollinator-related bills introduced than ever before. The following are exciting, high priority opportunities for pollinator protection that Minnesota legislators will be deciding on during the next few months.

#### Notes

- 1 In 2017, 87% of Minnesotans surveyed were concerned about pollinator losses. Minnesota Environmental Partnership, *Minnesota Voters' Environmental Priorities in 2017*, 32 (last visited Feb. 26, 2019), <https://bit.ly/2P0q5Ik>.
- 2 See Bee Informed Partnership, *2017/18 Total Annual Colony Loss Map*, (last visited Feb. 26, 2019), <https://bit.ly/2HphoeW>, and select “Annual” under the “Season” tab.
- 3 MDA, *Review of Neonicotinoid Use, Registration,*

*and Insect Pollinator Impacts in Minnesota*, 55-56 (Aug. 2016), <https://bit.ly/2R0CmlR>.

- 4 Jennifer Hopwood et al., *How Neonicotinoids Can Kill Bees* (2nd Ed.), Xerces Society (2016), <https://bit.ly/2lqfQ6h>.
- 5 Doug Gurian-Sherman, *Alternatives to Neonicotinoid Insecticide-Coated Corn Seed: Agroecological Methods Are Better for Farmers and The Environment*, Center for Food Safety (May 2017), <https://bit.ly/2qtbeQl>.

### 2019 Legislation

- 1 Restricting Neonics to Licensed Applicators GCPP Recommendation 2.2:** This proposal limits the sale and use of neonics for cosmetic purposes. Residential products pose considerable hazards for pollinators because of their permissive labeling, with some approved for use at rates up to 120 times higher than levels approved on farm fields.<sup>4</sup> This proposal protects urban waterways from neonic contamination and the habitat of the endangered rusty patched bumble bee, which largely covers the Twin Cities metropolitan area.
- 2 Banning Neonics in Wildlife Management Areas HF 721/SF 941; GCPP Recommendation 1.9:** While the Department of Natural Resources currently prohibits the use of neonicotinoid insecticides (neonics) in Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) across the state, this bill guarantees that WMAs remain a safe haven for pollinators well into the future. This bipartisan bill is a practical way to preserve healthy pollinator forage for generations to come.
- 3 Providing Assistance to Farmers Using Neonic-Free Seeds GCPP Recommendation 2.1:** This program offers financial assistance to farmers to plant corn and soybean seed not treated with neonics. These treatments are widely used but provide little to no yield benefit for corn and soybeans,<sup>5</sup> especially in Minnesota's climate. Still, transitioning seed supply can be logistically and financially challenging for many farmers. This program helps interested farmers make the switch.
- 4 Restoring Local Control Over Pesticides HF 212/SF 1157, HF 1255:** Since 1987, Minnesota has preempted localities from passing their own pesticide control ordinances. State policies should be a floor, not a ceiling—and communities that decide to go above and beyond should not be stopped from doing so. Two bills currently address this issue. HF 212 restores local control to Minnesota's four largest cities, while HF 1255 extends local control to all cities in Minnesota.
- 5 “Lawn to Legumes” Cost Share Program HF 776/SF 1276; GCPP Recommendation 1.2:** This bill establishes cost share grants for homeowners, cities, counties, and public schools to replace lawns with pollinator-friendly forbs, legumes, and native vegetation.
- 6 Creating a Pollinator Protection Account HF 1252:** This bill funds programs, research, and outreach for pollinators through an increased pesticide registration fee—paid by the pesticide producers—on products listed by the EPA as harmful to bees.

**We can't make any progress without involvement from people like you.** Even a coalition of five constituents can be enough to turn the tide. To find your legislator's contact information, go to <https://www.gis.leg.mn/iMaps/districts/>. To get involved and learn more, contact [willa@panna.org](mailto:willa@panna.org).

