



Supplemental Project Launch

Collaborative Conservation: Leveraging Citizen Scientists in Right-of-Way Pollinator Monitoring

This webcast introduced a proposed supplemental project to expand pollinator monitoring on utility rights-of-way, substations, and other utility lands planted with native seed mixes. The concept is to leverage trained citizen scientists to collect standardized, comparable data that can support internal conservation goals, sustainability reporting, and voluntary conservation programs.

Project Rationale and Monitoring Challenges

Utilities are increasingly installing native seed mixes and pollinator habitat for operational, environmental, and community-relation drivers. However, consistent pollinator monitoring can be difficult due to training needs for species identification, time and travel demands for fieldwork, and the effort required to enter, manage, and analyze data over multiple seasons.

Proposed Citizen-Science Monitoring Concept

The project proposes using citizen scientists to increase monitoring coverage and consistency while reducing staff/contractor burden. The intent is to generate quantitative monitoring data that can be compared across sites and regions, support sustainability reporting, and contribute to voluntary conservation efforts such as monarch-related programs.

Site Selection and Accessibility

Participating utilities would identify one to three candidate sites, with emphasis on locations that are easily accessible to volunteers (e.g., near parks or natural areas with public access). To control cost and travel, sites would ideally be within one county or in nearby counties.

Volunteer Recruitment and Training Model

A primary target volunteer group is the Master Gardener community, given established volunteer-hour requirements and prior success engaging them in similar efforts. The approach remains flexible to include other community partners, contractors, employees, or student interns where appropriate.

Standardized Protocol and Training Materials

A standardized sampling protocol would be developed for use across all participating utilities. Training would cover pollinator group identification, any priority plant taxa (e.g., milkweeds, lupines), field sampling methods, and data entry procedures. Planned training materials include a lecture, field guide (photo-based), field protocol documents, and field data sheets. Training would be delivered in person and include hands-on practice at the site(s).

Data Collection, Management, and Reporting

Volunteers would conduct transect-based visual counts of pollinator groups and potentially record selected plant taxa. Data submission methods may vary based on volunteer comfort and could include app-based forms, spreadsheets, or paper sheets with subsequent transcription. Data would be compiled and analyzed, with a utility-specific technical report produced for each participant and a webinar presenting results to the group.

Example Metrics and Identification Approach

The monitoring is designed around identification at practical group levels that are feasible for trained volunteers. Examples include distinguishing bumblebees, honeybees, carpenter bees, metallic green bees, plus broader categories such as “small bees” and “other large bees.” Butterfly groupings would include monarchs and swallowtails, with additional common categories such as “yellow” and “white” butterflies. Other easy-to-record groups may include lady beetles, predatory wasps, and syrphid flies. Group richness is also envisioned as a metric. The protocol can be tailored to include regionally relevant species or plants of interest, with optional use of phone-based identification support where needed.

Alignment with Voluntary Conservation Programs

The approach can be paired with monarch program monitoring by training volunteers to complete a tiered scorecard while also collecting supplemental pollinator observations that go beyond the scorecard. Plant identification (including milkweeds) may require region-specific tailoring to ensure volunteers learn the most likely species at each site.

Project Duration and Cost

The proposed effort is structured as a two-year study totaling \$45,000 (approximately \$22,500 per year). Year 1 focuses on site selection and training development; Year 2 focuses on in-person training and data collection. The project is described as eligible for SDF funding and open to members and other organizations with relevant urban assets and interest in pollinator monitoring.