



Tips for Creating Monarch Habitat in Rights-of-Way Areas

Written by the members of the Rights-of-Way Working Group of the Wisconsin Monarch Collaborative

Below are a few basic steps to consider when creating or maintaining habitat in rights-of-way areas. There are numerous resources available to provide additional guidance on these steps. Refer to the links under the “Connect” tab.

Step 1: Understand what you have

- Consider conducting a ROW vegetation inventory to determine baseline conditions. Inventories should include a review of invasive or noxious weeds as well as native plants. Inventories may not be possible due to schedule or budget constraints, but can provide helpful planning information.
- Preserve existing habitat, including remnant habitats, existing native vegetation and species-specific host plants.
- Identify vegetation management needs, including invasive species or noxious weed management.
- Prioritize! It’s best to start small and grow your pollinator program over time. Consider your goals and organization priorities when identifying your priority sites. Example goals may include: providing habitat for a declining species, providing diverse pollinator habitat, connecting habitat patches, etc.

Step 2: Plant native species

Whenever possible, plant native species instead of non-natives.

- Incorporate native seed mixes into ROW restoration projects
- Update seed mixes. Include native species in existing seed mixes or develop new, native seed mixes. Add host plants for specialist species, like milkweed for the monarch butterfly.

Benefits: Native plant species have numerous ecological benefits as well as economic benefits. Native plants:

- Tend to be better adapted for local conditions, helping them deal with Wisconsin’s dynamic climate
- Provide numerous ecological services, including habitat for pollinators
- Help address ROW vegetation goals, including soil stabilization, stormwater management and erosion control
- Economical: In the long-term, native plants tend to be more cost effective than non-native plants.



Step 3: Incorporate integrated vegetation management principles into your policies and practices

- Adjust mowing practices
 - Mow less frequently, such as one time per year. This can be done with consideration for safety, ROW operational goals, and other management needs, like invasive species.
 - Focus mowing efforts on important safety areas, leaving refugia (natural areas) for pollinators and other wildlife.
 - Adjust mowing timing in a way that addresses ROW operational needs, but also allows for pollinator habitat when the species need it.
 - If possible, avoid mowing native plants, like milkweed.
- Use herbicides sparingly, only as needed.
 - Focus herbicide efforts on target species
 - Avoid broadcast spraying
- Consider alternative management strategies, such as prescribed burns or prescribed grazing
 - Prescribed burns can be helpful to suppress invasive species and encourage native plant growth.
 - Grazing can be used as a surrogate for prescribed burns or herbicide, but special consideration is needed for sensitive species and habitats.

Step 4: Maintain what you created or preserved

Routine maintenance will help support and maintain your restoration or preservation efforts.

- Use an integrated vegetation management approach, as briefly described above, to maintain what you created or preserved.
- Manage target invasive species to encourage growth of native species.

Step 5: Harness the power of partnerships

Partnerships are great opportunities to preserve, restore and enhance pollinator habitat. There are numerous groups, including government agencies, non-profit groups, citizen groups and private businesses, that are interested in pollinator conservation. There may be partnership opportunities available to fund or contribute to restoration and preservation efforts, or to monitor your success.

Key Resources:

- [Rights-of-Way Stewardship Council](http://www.rowstewardship.org/) — This is an accreditation program that establishes standards for rights-of-way vegetation management corridors.
(<http://www.rowstewardship.org/>)
- [Federal Highway Administration's Environmental Review Toolkit: Pollinators](#) — This toolkit has numerous resources, including technical publications; guidance; case studies;

and funding opportunities for creating, improving and maintaining pollinator habitat along roadsides.

(https://www.environment.fhwa.dot.gov/env_topics/ecosystems/pollinators.aspx)

- ['Rights-of-Way as Habitat' Working Group](http://www.erc.uic.edu/biofuels-bioenergy/pollinator-habitat/rights-of-way-as-habitat) — This group provides a forum to collaborate, share ideas, and identify best practices for habitat conservation on rights-of-way and other working land. The group's website has a variety of different resources, tools, best management practices, case studies, and information on funding opportunities.
(<http://www.erc.uic.edu/biofuels-bioenergy/pollinator-habitat/rights-of-way-as-habitat>)