

Statement of Wendy Caldwell, Executive Director, Monarch Joint Venture

Submitted to Congresswoman Betty McCollum

February 24, 2020

I am Wendy Caldwell, and as the Executive Director of the Monarch Joint Venture, I am honored to provide testimony on our federal priorities to address the dramatic decline of monarch butterflies and the loss of vital pollinator habitat.

Background

Since 2009, the Monarch Joint Venture has been the leading organization dedicated to monarch butterfly conservation in the United States. We build strategic partnerships for grassland conservation across the U.S., emphasizing the importance of abundant habitat and biodiversity for a multitude of environmental concerns. Our work leverages the charisma of the monarch butterfly to inspire to action people of all ages and from all walks of life to engage in conservation and enjoy nature. Our main objective is to improve the quality and abundance of monarch habitat across the United States, supporting the biodiversity of plants and animals and improving the ecological services provided by those landscapes. The Monarch Joint Venture coordinates a network of nearly 90 partner organizations across the U.S. to deliver effective habitat conservation by focusing on a few main priorities.

The Problem

Dramatic monarch population declines (>80% in just 20 years) have garnered international attention and support for a rapidly growing conservation movement. Without efforts like those of MJV and our partners, we face an even greater risk of losing the amazing North American monarch migratory phenomenon. Working to protect monarchs and the habitat that sustains them is beneficial for many issues such as improving water quality and soil health and sustaining biodiversity, including a diversity of other pollinators who use monarch habitat.

Priority Solutions

1. Delivering science-based recommendations for effective conservation

A fundamental recommendation for combatting population declines is to restore habitat everywhere possible. While we understand the basic needs of species like the monarch butterfly, there are limits in our knowledge. Additionally, the magnitude of habitat that has been lost or degraded presents a significant challenge for restoring the species back to a sustainable level. As the primary authority for delivering science-based recommendations to most effectively conserve monarchs and their habitats, we use applied research to inform conservation. We need to know when, where, and how habitat is most effective, and adjust our practices to ensure maximum effectiveness of every parcel of land restored or protected to support pollinators. Our federal partners, the US Forest Service International Programs, US Fish and Wildlife Service, US Geological Survey, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Bureau of Land Management, and National Park Service, have been instrumental in designing and strategizing for the implementation of the Integrated Monarch Monitoring Program that will meet broad information needs, help to track and evaluate conservation efforts and assess the status of monarchs and their habitats across North America. While our federal partners invested in program development, and express a desire

for full program implementation, financial support for implementation has been minimal. Federal and non-federal partner organizations often find it challenging to prioritize or utilize existing time and resources for monitoring, and it is difficult to secure funding to implement monitoring activities. Most investments are made on new habitat restorations, although many do not include long-term evaluation measures to gauge their effectiveness or success. These challenges make it very difficult for the MJV to lead implementation of this national scale monitoring program, and therefore we recommend increasing financial support for monarch research and monitoring priorities. Tracking and evaluating habitat conservation is of equal and utmost importance to improve the efficiency of dollars spent on landscape restoration.

2. Educating to increase conservation action

Secondly, we work to increase monarch conservation action through widespread education efforts. The Monarch Joint Venture is the clearinghouse for information and educational resources for monarch conservation in the U.S., which requires additional capacity and coordination as our network grows. As an engagement tool, monarchs are highly utilized by conservation and other organizational partners to engage employees, volunteers, youth/students, or members of the general public in conservation and sustainability activities. To increase our reach and best equip our network to deliver effective education that results in increased conservation action, we work with a train-the-trainer model. We teach educational leaders to deliver monarch conservation curricula, citizen science opportunities, consistent messaging, key conservation priorities, and updates on the status of the species and our collective conservation impact.

Funding Status and Needs

Monarch Joint Venture relies on building strong partnerships to deploy these conservation priorities, and our network is growing at the rate of 15-20 organizations per year. Historically, MJV has received foundational support from government agencies, primarily the U.S. Forest Service International Programs, with additional grant and donation support. As more, and more diverse, organizations are coming to the conservation table, our needs for increased capacity and resources also increase. From federal and state agencies to academic institutions to businesses, each of our partners brings unique strengths to the network. Partnerships have grown across sectors, including agriculture, energy and transportation, urban and municipal, and protected lands, requiring varied conservation approaches which put more demands on MJV's staff. Geographically, partners span the U.S., presenting yet more complexity in coordinating effective conservation strategies. In order to utilize the collective strengths of partners, MJV's staff experts provide customized and coordinated strategies and recommendations best suited to each organization. As a coordinating entity, MJV prioritizes increasing expert staff capacity to better serve the needs of our partner network and grow our conservation impact.

Because monarch conservation is an issue that captivates the hearts and minds of the American public and one that brings opportunities for international cooperation and collaboration, **I am honored to share with you our priorities, and a recommendation for increased congressional support for these priorities in the amount of \$1,000,000.**

Thank you for your consideration of this request to support monarch butterfly conservation. The MJV is a driving force for monarch and broader conservation efforts and strives to continue growing and supporting a vast network working together to serve this mission.