



Frequently Asked Questions

Here are some frequently asked questions (FAQs) that the general public and DOT staff may have regarding pollinator conservation and roadsides.

Why Are Pollinators Important?

Pollinators are important to human health and well-being. More than 85 percent of flowering plants require an animal, usually an insect, for pollination. One out of every three bites of food is pollinated by an insect, including bees, butterflies, moths, wasps, flies, and beetles. Unfortunately, populations of many insect pollinators are declining. This includes species that were formerly widespread, such as the monarch butterfly. Insect pollinator populations are declining due to a range of factors, including habitat loss, pesticide exposure, and extreme weather events.

How Can My DOT Help Pollinators?

DOTs can help pollinators by creating pollinator habitat along roadsides that includes a diversity of native plants. DOTs can also help pollinators by protecting plant species that are important to pollinators where they occur along roadsides. These include preferred nectar and/or pollen plants as well as butterfly and moth host plants (i.e., the plants that caterpillars eat) of local pollinators.

Do Roadsides Make Good Habitat for Pollinators?

Yes! Roadsides can provide good habitat for pollinators when the habitat contains a variety of native plants that provide food, nesting sites, and places to overwinter. Food for pollinators can mean host plants for butterfly or moth caterpillars as well as flowers, which provide nectar and pollen.

Why Is It Important to Create Pollinator Habitat along Roadsides?

One of the primary drivers of biodiversity decline for many species, including pollinators, is habitat loss. With more than 10 million acres in the United States, roadsides present a valuable opportunity to increase the amount of habitat available to pollinators. Increasing the amount of habitat available will increase the number of pollinators that can be supported on the landscape, thereby decreasing the risk of extinction. Roadside habitat is also ideally suited to increasing habitat connectivity, making it easier for animals to move among high-quality habitat patches such as nature preserves or other natural areas. Increased habitat connectivity also helps to reduce extinction risks.



Will Pollinator Habitat Affect Driver Safety?

No. Driver safety is a top priority for DOTs. Pollinator habitat can be maintained or planted along roadsides beyond the mown strip in the recovery area so that safety is not compromised.

Will Pollinators Be Killed by Traffic?

Although some pollinators are killed by traffic, research suggests that creating pollinator habitat along roadsides does not increase the proportion of pollinators killed. In fact, some research shows that pollinator mortality from traffic is actually lower in places where roadside vegetation has more plant species. Quality habitat on roadsides may reduce the proportion of pollinators killed by vehicles by providing necessary habitat, thereby reducing the need for pollinators to move elsewhere. In many parts of the country, roadsides are the primary sources of habitat; therefore, ensuring that roadsides have native plants that provide the resources pollinators need is highly beneficial. Roadsides can also be very important for increasing habitat connectivity.

Are There Other Advantages to Creating Roadside Habitat for Pollinators?

Creating resilient pollinator habitat along roadsides has many additional benefits beyond conservation. Pollinator habitat helps control erosion and reduces runoff, which reduces flooding and improves water quality. Planting a diverse assemblage of native plants can also increase soil health. In addition, habitat for pollinators can provide habitat for other beneficial insects, such as insect predators that contribute to the control of crop pests.

How Can I Help?

You can help by contacting your representatives at all levels of government and letting them know that you support DOT efforts to increase pollinator habitat along roadsides. In your own communities, you can help pollinators by planting native plants and reducing your use of pesticides, especially insecticides, around your home.

For more details and research references, please see: Pollinator Habitat Conservation Along Roadways, Volumes 1-16. National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. Project materials available here: <https://www.trb.org/NCHRP/NCHRPWOD362.aspx>

This fact sheet was created through NCHRP 20-44(55): Implementing NCHRP Guides on Pollinator Habitat Conservation along Roadways.

Banner Photo: Native roadside habitat in eastern Iowa. (Photo: Maria Urice, Living Roadway Trust Fund.)