

Great Lakes Pollinator Task Force: Collaboration to Overcome Conservation Challenges

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Native insect pollinators are important components of ecosystems, acting as keystone species, providing ecosystem resilience and economically important ecosystem services. Several pollinator species have demonstrated significant population and distribution declines across the U.S., including within the Great Lakes Basin. Critically, some species are now facing extinction, such as Poweshiek skipperling, Mitchell's satyr butterfly, and rusty-patched bumble bee. Other once-common species are now being considered for protection under the Endangered Species Act, such as monarch butterfly and American bumble bee, species that could be representative of declines in other pollinators in the region.

The Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) Pollinator Task Force, funded through the Environmental Protection Agency, is a collaborative, multi-agency team whose mission is to increase pollinator community resiliency, reduce or eliminate the future need to list native insect pollinator species under the Endangered Species Act, restore diverse interconnected pollinator habitat, and increase awareness and knowledge of Great Lakes native pollinator conservation issues and collaborative efforts. The Task Force hopes to initiate a paradigm shift in the way restoration work is carried out by pulling together a diverse stakeholder group, incorporating innovative science that directly informs on the groundwork and prompting land managers to be more mindful of impacts on and benefits to pollinators in habitat restoration or management efforts.

With a focus on native bees, the Task Force is working with partners, across multiple scales to identify, prioritize and refine activities and focus areas for habitat restoration within the Great Lakes Basin in the face of many threats, how to communicate the importance of these conservation efforts to multiple audiences and how to work more effectively as a team. This presentation will review challenges faced and lessons learned by the Task Force that can aid conservation efforts far beyond the boundaries of the Great Lakes Basin.

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