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Bee prepared

Created on Wednesday, 10 August 2016 15:34 | Written by Jake Hartman |
Wilsonville made the news across the country during the unfortunate timing of National Pollinator Week in June 2013. An estimated 50,000 bumble bees were found dead beneath the European linden trees outside the Wilsonville Target June 15, the result of pesticides applied out of season.

Although the affected trees were all on Target property, the event nevertheless made Wilsonville a name synonymous with the rapid decline of pollinator populations across the country. But there is an upshot, according to Sharon Selvaggio, the Water and Wildlife program director with the Northwest Center for Alternatives to Pesticides (NCAP).

“We realized that the City of Wilsonville really had an opportunity to become a national leader in pollinator conservation,” Selvaggio says. “We kind of look at it as turning lemons into lemonade.”

NCAP is creating a new project and will be working with the City on “Bee Stewards Wilsonville.” The program is expected to create pollinator habitats throughout the city, educate residents and more.

Selvaggio says that the problem of bee decline is one that vitally needs addressing. “Pollinators are responsible for one in three bites of food,” she says. “Habitat conservation is absolutely critical.”

Developed by NCAP, Bee Stewards has several core components. The City of Wilsonville will work to create flower-rich, native-plant pollinator habitats at a number of spots around town, including in eastern Memorial Park, at Wilsonville Water Treatment Plant Park and on Wilsonville Road medians between Memorial Park and Wilsonville High School.

In total, the City hopes to create some 2 acres of pollinator habitat, according to Natural Resources Manager Kerry Rappold.

“We see it as very much a comprehensive program,” Rappold says. Pollinator habitats will also be fitted with interpretive signs.

“I think people will find these interesting and compelling sites,” Rappold says.

NCAP has been in dialogue with the West Linn-Wilsonville School District about possibly adding pollinator habitats to sites like the Center for Research in Environmental Science and Technologies (CREST) Center. Bee Stewards also hopes to provide materials that could further pollinator education in the classroom, and to work with student groups who have an interest in the subject.

The City and NCAP hope to educate adults about pollinator conservation as well, especially via a workshop and a kit that have information on planting one’s own pollinator habitat.

“Even with just a few plants in your yard, it’s a pollinator habitat,” Selvaggio says. “Everybody can make a difference.”

Rappold says that to that end, many of the materials prepared as a part of the kit will be prepared in Spanish as well. Groups like the Xerces Society, the Northwest Youth Corps and Friends of Trees are also being asked to contribute to the project.

Another important goal of Bee Stewards is to establish an Integrated Pest Management plan for the City. The City does not currently have such a plan, which would set standards for what sort of pesticides are suitable for use, and how to most safely use them.

“We do practice those types of things already in terms of IPM, but we don’t have a plan that’s specific to Wilsonville,” Rappold says.

The Bee Stewards program received some $37,000 in funding this spring from a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service grant. It also received around $21,000 from the Wilsonville-Metro Community Enhancement Program earlier this summer, and is applying for a grant from regional government Metro.

With a two-year time frame to realize Bee Stewards’ objectives, Selvaggio says that NCAP hopes to begin planting the habitats this fall. Rappold says he’s excited to begin.

“It’s something that’s going to make us feel like we’ve turned the corner in terms of what happened with that bee kill, and that we’re headed with a new direction,” he says.
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