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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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POLLINATORS ARE WELCOME HERE

“Pollinator Park”, a natural habitat, to be created on city’s south side

MUSCATINE, Iowa – Pollinators are not unlike humans ... they need green spaces and areas where they can live and find food while fulfilling their life’s mission. Butterflies and bees are among those pollinators that help create a healthy environment while also helping plants create the seeds and fruit that many other species need to survive.

The Monarch butterfly and the honey bee are just two such pollinators. Bees, bats and other animal pollinators face many challenges. The loss of habitats, disease, parasites, the increased use of chemicals in neighborhood gardens and on agricultural lands, and environmental contaminants have led to a decline in many pollinator species. This decline is just one of the reasons that organizations and individuals have banded together to create areas where pollinators can thrive.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture states that three-fourths of the world’s flowering plants and about 35 percent of the world’s food crops depend on animal pollinators to reproduce. More than 3,500 species of native bees help increase crop yields. Some scientists estimate that one out of every three bites of food we eat exists because of animal pollinators like bees, butterflies and moths, birds and bats, and beetles and other insects.

Muscatine is no exception to this effort.

The City of Muscatine has joined forces with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the Muscatine Pollinator Project to develop a 30-acre plot of land on the city’s south side into a native habitat that is tentatively called “Pollinator Park”.



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“We were asked to mow the weeds on this land after people stopped farming it four years ago,” Jon Koch, Water Pollution Plant and Stormwater Department director, said. “I looked at the land and said ‘Hey, let’s do something good.’ We talked it over, made some plans, and everyone thought it was a good idea.”

The three entities signed a landowner agreement for the property that is owned by the City of Muscatine after approval by the City Council at its May 4 meeting. The agreement allows the USFWS and the Muscatine Pollinator Project the authority to complete the habitat improvement project and participate in wildlife management practices along with the City of Muscatine.

Ron Knopik, deputy director of the Port Louisa National Wildlife Refuge, led the effort to develop and write the agreement with the assistance of the Muscatine Stormwater Department, the Muscatine Pollinator Project, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, the Muscatine County Conservation Board, Trees Forever, and other local experts.

“When Jon (Koch) proposed utilizing this property as a pollinator park, it not only fit perfectly with my program but also with all the pollinator initiatives that are going on in the state of Iowa and nationally,” Knopik said.

Koch believes that the development of the park along with a mile long multi-use recreational trail running around the perimeter of the park will be a great asset to Muscatine.

“The idea that we could have people come to town to see this, and people do travel to places like this, is exciting,” Koch said. “People come from all over the place to see things like what they will see in this park. This will be good for Muscatine, good for tourism, and good for the people who come through on the bike trail. It will be a nice little spur, an extra place for them to come off the trail and see a natural habitat.”



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The property is located next to the Muscatine Transfer Station on South Houser Street and consists of a mix of upland, wetland, and woodland areas with predominately flat topography except for the steep slopes associated with the Muscatine Slough along the southern border.

“We are not disturbing the areas already declared wetlands by the DNR, just cleaning it up and making it more effective as a wetland,” Koch said.

The creation of a pollinator garden will be done in stages with seeding of eight acres of prairie land this spring and another eight acres this fall. Trees and shrubs including serviceberry, dogwoods, plums, and viburnums will be added to a two-acre area on the southwest corner.

“There is a pollinator mix that has roughly 40 wildflowers and about 10 grasses in it,” Knopik said. “There are a lot of pollinator friendly plants that will bloom at different times throughout the year.”

Koch applied and was awarded a grant from the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation for the seed which will be seeded by the Muscatine chapter of the Nature Conservancy. It will take two to three years for the park to mature and host an abundance of pollinators including the endangered Monarch butterfly along with native bees, moths, bats, and others.

“We are already certified as a Monarch Waystation,” Koch said.

While the major development of this park will be in the seeding of the prairie and caretaking of the woodland areas, officials also plan to have smaller garden areas closer to the trail where individuals can glean a better understanding of the park’s purpose.

“These areas along the trail will give people an idea of what is happening in the park without them having to get off the trail,” Koch said. “It is something that we have done in other areas in the city and it has been quite well received.”



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While the park will support actions identified in the Regional Partners for Fish and Wildlife (Partners) Strategic Plan in restoring habitat, the local project will also serve an educational purpose with the delivery of hands-on programs to the public and educational outreach to local schools.

“Overall, this partnership between the PFW Program of the USFWS, the City of Muscatine, the Muscatine Pollinator Project, and the many other partners will provide diverse native prairie and woodland habitat for a host of pollinators, migratory and breeding grassland birds, and forage and shelter for numerous other species,” Koch said.

School children and avid gardeners from novice to expert will also benefit from the educational resources that will be a part of the park.

Another aspect will be a proposed 300-plus tree nursery in an area of turf grass near the entrance to the transfer station. Potential species in this planting include river birch, oaks, hackberry, and Ohio buckeye which could be used throughout the city to augment the diversity of city boulevards and parks.

For more information on the project be sure to like the [Muscatine Pollinator Project](#) Facebook page. You may also contact Jon Koch at jkoch@muscatineiowa.gov or call 563.263.2752. You can also visit [USDA National Resources Conservation Service](#) for more information on pollinators.