

Memorandum

To: Service Directorate

From: Director

Subject: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Monarch Butterfly Conservation Strategy

The North American monarch butterfly migration is one of nature's most spectacular natural phenomena. The eastern monarch population migrates annually from summer breeding habitat in the central and eastern U.S. and Canada to overwintering grounds in central Mexico. Monarchs from west of the Rocky Mountains undergo a similar, but shorter annual migration to sites along the California coast. Monarchs are in trouble and we can do something about it.

The eastern population has declined precipitously over the past decade. Last winter, scientists recorded extremely low numbers in the Mexican wintering grounds, representing a 90 percent decrease in population since the mid-1990s. The western population faces similar declines.

Limiting factors are numerous, including an extensive loss of milkweed, the monarch's sole larval food source, due to urban development and shifts in agricultural practices; land management activities, such as mowing and herbicide applications along roadsides and rights-of-way; use of insecticides; and severe weather events likely related to climate change.

In response, President Obama, President Peña Nieto of Mexico, and Prime Minister Harper of Canada reached an agreement at the 2014 North American Leaders Summit to *"establish a working group to ensure the conservation of the Monarch butterfly, a species that symbolizes our association."* And on June 20, 2014, President Obama signed a Presidential Memorandum, *"Creating a Federal Strategy to Promote the Health of Honey Bees and Other Pollinators,"* outlining an expedited agenda to address the devastating declines in honey bees and native pollinators, including the monarch butterfly (Attachment A).

The success of both initiatives requires immediate actions to replace and restore monarch and pollinator habitat on both public and private lands across the U.S. landscape. I have been tasked by Secretary Jewell to convene an interagency High Level Working Group (HLWG) to develop and implement a U.S. strategy for monarch conservation, coordinate our efforts with Mexico and Canada through the Trilateral Committee for Wildlife and Ecosystem Conservation and Management, and ensure that the monarch strategy is coordinated with development of the Federal Pollinator Strategy and DOI assignments in the Presidential Memo.

The timeline for both initiatives is ambitious. A Trinational Monarch Butterfly Conservation Action Plan to update the 2008 North American Monarch Conservation Plan will be delivered at the 2015 North American Leaders Summit in late February or March. The Federal Pollinator Strategy is due to the White House in mid-December 2014.

To fulfill these commitments, we must develop a Service strategy for monarch conservation addressing plans for habitat restoration and enhancement, education and outreach, and monitoring and research needs.

To complete this assignment, I am asking Regional and Headquarters leadership to:

- Designate a Regional and program point of contact to serve on the Service Monarch Conservation Team. Team members will participate in synthesis of the Service-wide Monarch Conservation Strategy, and assist in coordinating our response to the DOI Pollinator Task Force **(POC information due September 10)**.
- Develop a Regional list of monarch habitat creation and restoration projects for immediate implementation in Fall 2014 and Spring 2015 on Service lands and facilities, and on state and private lands through partnership projects **(due October 8)**.
- Use the monarch butterfly as a flagship species, as we continue our surrogate species approach.
- Undertake outreach and engagement activities to support pollinator education for schools, nature centers, and other citizen involvement activities.

Please provide your responses to Donita Cotter, Monarch Conservation Strategy Coordinator, donita_cotter@fws.gov, (703) 358-2383 by the requested due dates.