Are Monarchs at Risk?

Each fall millions of monarch butterflies migrate to overwintering sites in Mexico and to a scattering of locations along the coast of California. In the spring monarchs return to breeding areas and the cycle starts again: a two-way migration that is one of the most spectacular on the planet.Yet, this migration appears to be declining.Researchers are working to determine the causes of this decline; some theories include:

●Loss of milkweed needed for monarch caterpillars to grow and develop, due to habitat conversion and adverse land management

●Drought conditions in California and other areas in the western U.S., resulting in lower milkweed biomass, and reduced availability of milkweed late in the summer

●Insecticide and herbicide use to control insects and weeds, with unintended consequences for monarchs

●Overwintering habitat loss and degradation in California, due to development within and adjacent to overwintering groves, and decay of overwintering trees as they age

●Habitat loss in overwintering sites in Mexico, due to illegal logging

How Can You Help Monarchs?

The monarch migration occurs twice every year. Nectar from flowers provides the fuel monarchs need to fly. If there are not any blooming plants to collect nectar from when the monarchs stops, they will not have any energy to continue. Planting monarch flowers that bloom when they will be passing will help the monarchs reach their destination. Creating more monarch habitat will help work to reverse their decline.

Key components of managed corridor habitat:

- **A mix of native flowers with different bloom times**, including some overlap in flowering, to ensure a stable food source for butterflies. A combination of early, middle and late blooming species will fuel butterfly breeding and migration.
- **Native milkweed** to provide food for monarch caterpillars.
- **Minimal, well-timed management** that limits impacts to all pollinators, including butterflies, while eliminating woody species as needed. Preferably, mowing should be limited to times when plants have died back or are dormant. Mowing at any time (even in the winter) kills insects. In the summer, some insects can’t get away from the mower, especially eggs and caterpillars. In the winter insects may be dormant in leaf litter or plant stems. Mowing in patches ensures that pollinators can recolonize mowed areas.

- **Avoid insecticides.**

Creating Breeding Habitat for Monarchs

To reverse the breeding habitat loss in the U.S., the MJV promotes the inclusion of native milkweed and nectar plants in restoration efforts across the country ranging from small gardens to natural areas and corporate landscapes.

Key components of garden habitat:

- Gardens should be planted in **sunny spots, with protection from the wind.**
- **At least one milkweed specie**s that is native to the area will provide food for monarch caterpillars.
- **A variety of nectar plants with staggered bloom times** give butterflies and other pollinators a continuous food source. Include a combination of early, middle and late blooming species to fuel butterfly breeding and migration.
- **Herbicides and pesticides should be avoided**, as they can hurt caterpillars and adults. Plant milkweed! Monarch caterpillars need milkweeds to grow and develop. There are over 100 milkweed species that are native to North America.