

TO: Robert Moon, Mayor, City of Palm Springs
FROM: Members of the Sustainability Commission
SUBJECT: Mayors' Pledge Request, "Milkweed for Monarchs" Project
DATE: February 20, 2018 (Updated draft)

SUMMARY

The Sustainability Commission is taking the lead on a project to bring back a habitat and increase the number of monarch butterflies in Palm Springs and the Coachella Valley. Increasing the number of monarchs in the Coachella Valley is important, because they are significant pollinators for local fruit, nut and vegetable growers. We have formed an ad hoc committee to seek the support of the City of Palm Springs, community partners, and neighborhoods to support this project.

One way for the City of Palm Springs to commit to create a habitat for the monarch butterfly and to educate citizens about how they can make a difference at home and in the community is by taking the National Wildlife Federation's Mayors' Monarch Pledge.

BACKGROUND

The monarch butterfly is known for the migration it makes every year from Canada and the eastern, central and western United States to the central mountains of Mexico. Palm Springs is on the west coast fly-way for monarchs heading to and from Mexico. Unfortunately, the monarch butterfly is disappearing. Over the last twenty years, the population of monarch butterflies has declined by 90%.

While scientists aren't exactly sure what is causing them to vanish, they suggest that there may be a variety of factors. These include reduced habitat and food source as a result of farmlands becoming subdivisions, along with severe weather, climate change, disease, deforestation and the use of herbicides and pesticides (Cornell University doctoral study and National Academy of Sciences report).

Like all butterflies, monarchs lay their eggs on select plants, called "host plants." These are the only plants their caterpillars can eat during its early life cycle. For monarchs in Palm Springs, desert milkweed (*Asclepias subulata*) is their only host plant. Studies show that milkweed across the United States declined by 58% from 1999 to 2010, which has critically affected the monarch population.

As the populations of bees and other pollinators decrease, monarch butterflies play an even more significant role as pollinators for our locally grown source of nuts, fruits and vegetables.

MAYORS' PLEDGE

After the Mayor takes the Pledge, the National Wildlife Federation will work with the City to identify at least three specific actions to be initiated in the following year. Progress will be reported on an annual basis. The data collected will allow the National Wildlife Federation to track the collective outcomes of actions and the impact of its work.

Actions fall into the following three categories: Communications, Program and Demonstration Gardens, and Systems Change

Examples of communications actions are issuing a proclamation; holding a press conference after taking the Pledge; and providing information about Milkweed for Monarchs at local events. An information card has been produced. See attached. A calendar of local events such as the Farmer's Market and the ONE-PS picnic is being developed.

Examples of program and demonstration gardens actions are developing educational programs (*Here we can add information about educational programs*); planting monarch-friendly demonstration gardens at prominent locations; converting abandoned lots to monarch habitat; planting milkweed and native nectar plants to provide food for butterflies in medians, public rights-of-way, and community gardens; and hosting or supporting a city monarch butterfly festival. There are plans to sell milkweed plants and give away seeds for native nectar plants at the Farmer's Market and the ONE-PS picnic. There have been discussions with the Desert Healthcare District about planting milkweed at Wellness Park and with the Desert Water Agency about painting a mural and planting milkweed garden at its facility.

An example of systems change is to integrate monarch butterfly conservation into the City's Park Master Plan and Sustainability Plan.

The National Wildlife Federation will share best practices through its online resources section, occasional email updates, social media, and webinars.

The City will be asked to fill out a simple reporting form on an annual basis. The data collected will allow the National Wildlife Federation to track the collective outcomes and impact of its work.

More information about the Pledge can be found at <https://www.nwf.org/sitecore/content/Home/Garden-for-Wildlife/About/National-Initiatives/Mayors-Monarch-Pledge>.

REQUEST

The Sustainability Commission requests that Mayor Robert Moon take the National Wildlife Federation's Mayors' Monarch Pledge.

The link to the online form is <https://www.poll.nwf.org/mayors-monarch-pledge-survey>. The form is also attached.

The Sustainability Commission staff will be responsible for monitoring progress on the actions and submitting the annual reports.

Attachments:

Mayor's Pledge form

Milkweed for Monarchs information card

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