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The Administration's National Pollinator Strategy

Pollinators—including bees, butterflies, bats, birds, and other animal species—are not only important ecologically but also play an important role in global food production. Pollination contributes to the production of diverse high-value products, including fruits, vegetables, tree nuts, forage crops, and other crops. Worldwide, the contribution of pollinators to global food production is valued at about \$190 billion each year. In the United States, the value of insect pollination to U.S. crop production is estimated at \$15 billion annually.

Given the importance of bees and other types of pollinators to food production, many have expressed concern about whether a “pollinator crisis” is occurring. Recent concern began in 2006, when commercial beekeepers reported sharp declines in managed honey bee colonies. While some losses due to pests, parasites, and disease are common, higher-than-expected loss rates continue to be observed. In 2014, domestic commercial beekeepers reported losing approximately 40% of their honey bee colonies. Eastern monarch butterfly populations that overwinter in Mexico have decreased by an estimated 80-90% in two decades.

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Among other responses, Congress has addressed these concerns through the farm bills. Congress increased funding for honey bee research, authorized pollinator habitat protection in agricultural conservation programs, and provided disaster assistance in the 2008 farm bill (P.L. 110-246). The 2014 farm bill (P.L. 113-79) reauthorized and expanded some of these provisions. Recent congressional interest has centered on possible causes of pollinator declines, and oversight of the Administration's activities.

National Strategy

In June 2014, the Obama Administration issued a Presidential Memorandum directing federal agencies to take steps to protect and restore domestic populations of pollinators. The memorandum established the Pollinator Health Task Force (Task Force), which is co-chaired by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and includes leaders from 14 executive branch departments, agencies, and offices.

In May 2015, the Task Force issued the *National Strategy to Promote the Health of Honey Bees and Other Pollinators* (Strategy). The Strategy outlines three primary goals:

- reduce honey bee colony losses to sustainable levels,
- restore and enhance pollinator habitat acreage through public and private action, and
- increase monarch butterfly populations to protect annual migration.

The Strategy emphasizes the importance of pollinators by outlining enhanced pollinator research and federal land management through the engagement of state and local governments and private citizens. It includes (1) a pollinator research action plan, (2) opportunities for developing public-private partnerships, (3) approaches for improving pollinator habitat, (4) an expansion of public outreach and education, and (5) methods of protecting pollinators from exposure to pesticides.

The Strategy is an administrative initiative and therefore does not create or expand authorities, but rather prioritizes and coordinates existing authorities and activities across federal agencies. Each of the 14 departments, agencies, and offices involved in the Strategy has developed agency-specific Pollinator Protection Plans. These plans describe agency activities to achieve the Strategy's objectives for both short- and long-term pollinator improvement. For example, USDA's plan utilizes its extension, research, and land management activities to achieve the Strategy's main objectives. EPA's plan utilizes its authority to evaluate the effects of pesticides to inform their regulation and to assist states and tribes in developing their own pollinator protection plans.

The Strategy uses mostly existing funding, though it does highlight the President's budget request for an increase in certain agencies' funding for FY2016. The President's budget requests an increase of \$33.96 million for pollinator health programs. Of the \$33.96 million, \$30.41 million would go to USDA activities, primarily research and private land conservation; \$1.56 million would go to the Department of the Interior (DOI); and \$2 million would go to EPA (**Table 1**). The Strategy does not identify the current level of federal funding available for pollinator health.

Research Action Plan

The *Pollinator Research Action Plan*, a separate document accompanying the Strategy, outlines federally supported research objectives to improve gaps in knowledge concerning the impacts of pollinator health.

Table I. Requested Additional Funding for Selected Agencies According to the National Strategy (\$ Millions)

Agency	Program	FY2015 Enacted	FY2016 Requested	Change from FY2015 to FY2016
DOI	U.S Geological Survey (USGS)	0.00	1.56	1.56
EPA		0.00	2.00	1.50
USDA	National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS)	2.40	2.90	0.50
	Agricultural Research Service (ARS)	14.19	21.19	7.00
	National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA)	9.66	31.50	21.84
	Economic Research Service (ERS)	0.28	0.28	0.00
	Farm Service Agency (FSA)	18.00	18.06	0.06
	Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS)	3.00	4.00	1.00
	Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS)	1.00	1.00	0.00
Total		48.53	82.49	33.96

Source: Pollinator Health Task Force, *National Strategy to Promote the Health of Honey Bees and Other Pollinators*, White House, Washington, DC, May 19, 2015, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/microsites/ostp/Pollinator%20Health%20Strategy%202015.pdf>

Note: This table does not identify base funding, but rather only where the Strategy identifies a request for additional funding.

It is structured around major factors that have been associated with declines in pollinator health, as identified by federal experts and reviewed by subject-matter experts. These factors include pesticides and toxins, pests and pathogens, forage quality, and habitat loss.

The objectives of the research action plan are based on five priority actions that are studied in 10 particular subject areas. In each area, the impact of both individual and multiple stressors is considered, along with economic influences and ecosystem biodiversity. The priority actions are developing a baseline to assess conditions, understanding stakeholders and supporting their efforts, evaluating environmental stressors, restoring pollinator habitat, and curating knowledge to share.

Federal Land Management

Land management also plays a key role in the Strategy's goal of improving pollinator habitat. The Strategy outlines a number of actions for federal buildings, grounds, right-of-ways, and federally managed land; creates a native seed strategy; and strengthens federal guidance documents. It also promotes similar habitat-related practices that can be used on private land. To support these land management objectives, USDA and DOI issued a document accompanying the Strategy—*Pollinator-Friendly Best Management Practices for Federal Lands*. It focuses on general project development and land management practices that account for pollinator needs.

Next Steps

The Strategy highlights the role of public-private partnerships and indicates that the Task Force will prepare a Partnership Action Plan by the end of 2015. The progress and success of the Strategy will likely be measured by how well it accomplishes its main objectives.

Response

The Strategy has been welcomed by multiple stakeholders and interest groups invested in pollinator health. It has been praised for its framework to improve scientific research and to use public-private partnerships to address pollinator declines. Several have applauded the Strategy's multi-faceted approach, while others question whether the Strategy's scope is too far-reaching and therefore cumbersome to implement. Others have raised concerns that the Strategy does not go far enough in addressing specific areas of potential pollinator decline (e.g., pesticides and land use).

Other stakeholders question the longevity of the effort, as no comprehensive legislation on pollinator health has been enacted. While the Strategy does highlight measurable goals, it is unclear what further action will be taken on the implementation of the Strategy's recommendations relative to other agency mission needs.

Additional Resources

- The Administration's *National Strategy to Promote the Health of Honey Bees and Other Pollinators* and related content may be found at <http://wh.gov/iKdGA>.
- CRS Report R43191, *Bee Health: Background and Issues for Congress*

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