

Instruction to MnDOT on Pollinator-Friendly Practices

By Sue Leaf

HF 3462

This bill instructs the Department of Transportation to manage the state highway right of ways to encourage pollinators to thrive. In August, 2016, Governor Dayton issued an Executive Order (https://mn.gov/governor/assets/2016_08_25_EO_16-07_tcm1055-253931.pdf) directing MnDOT to do so;

MnDOT has begun cooperating with other agencies to develop Best Management Practices (BMPs). This bill will make MnDOT accountable to the legislature and requires tracking and reporting of their activities.



Photo by Don Dinndorf.

What is the issue?

Honey bees, native bees, monarch butterflies and other insects are showing alarming declines in populations that only two decades ago were stable. The causes are many and not well-understood, but one factor is that insects are starving. This bill is aimed at public lands—lands that YOU, the public, own.

Contact your legislators and tell them you value pollinators and expect them to be protected on state-owned lands, including road right of ways. Tell them you support HF 3462 as a one way to help pollinators. Here's the contact information: <https://www.leg.state.mn.us/leg/legdir>. You can send an email, a letter snail mail, or call them. Legislators seldom hear from constituents on most issues!

Anything else?

The numbers are dismal: Monarch butterflies have experienced a 90% drop in population continent wide in 20 years. The 700 native bee species in North America have declined more than 50%, and a quarter are at risk of extinction. Minnesota honey bee keepers lost 33% of their colonies in 2016-17, and this winter is looking worse.

The University of Minnesota has a terrific research program on bees (<https://www.beelab.umn.edu/meet-us/spivak-honey-bee-lab>) and it has found that numerous factors play into the insects' decline. The widely used class of pesticides, neonicotinoids, seem to play a role; so do the Round-up ready crops (corn and soybeans) that produce fields so 'clean' (that is, devoid of other flowering plants), there is nothing for foraging insects to eat. Lastly, honey bee colonies are prey to a mite that reduces viability of bees.

Roadside ditches throughout Minnesota harbor a variety of flowering plants, from grasses to sunflowers, and some have been seeded with native wildflowers.

While this law would apply only to the right of ways along state highways, counties and townships are encouraged to conform to the law as well.



Photo by Don Dinndorf.

Everyone needs pollinators. Not, 'should appreciate' but *needs*. World-wide, 35% of all food crops depend on insect, bird or bat pollination. Closer to home, here is a list of local produce that relies on insects to set fruit: apples, pears, and tomatoes, berries of all kinds, zucchini, winter squash, and peppers. Imagine how dull and un-nutritious your diet would be without these.