

Pollinator Working Group Meeting

Date: Thursday January 26, 2017

Time: 4:00 p.m. – 6:15 p.m.

Location: NRCS Conference Room
60 Quaker Lane, Warwick, RI

DRAFT MINUTES

Attendees:

Working Group Members: Meg Kerr, Joel Tirrell (absent), Shannon Brawley, David Brunetti, Gary Casabona, David Gregg, Rafael Nightingale, Don Joslin (absent), Robert Mann (absent), Lyn Spinella (absent, represented by RI Farm Bureau President, Henry Wright), Ken Payne, Lisa Tewksbury (absent), Ken Ayars (absent)

Guest: Howard Cook, Julia Bancroft, Judie Sky, Nessa Sky, Amanda Frietas, William Parker, Terry Meyer, Jim Lawson and Brianna O'Connor.

Meg Kerr called the meeting to Order at 4:07 PM

Working Group Business

Gary Casabona said that it would be nice to have 1-pager on what homeowners can do for pollinators. He agreed to create an initial draft.

David Brunetti moved passage of the January 5 minutes, second by Ken Payne, all approved.

Vanessa Venturini, Master Gardener State Program Leader - An overview of what the Master Gardener's program is doing to educate the public about pollinators.

URI Cooperative Extension – links university science to public outreach and education. Master Gardeners mission is to education citizens in environmentally sound practices for gardening. They use a train the trainers model, learning about the subject then teach others as certified master gardener. This is the 40th anniversary (1977 – 2017). Master gardeners reached about 8,000 people in 2016. Have about 40 demonstration projects – 4 emphasize pollinators (Norman Bird Sanctuary, East Farm Demonstration Garden, Charlestown Schoolhouse Garden and Newport Harbor Walk).

A newer program Desourdy School Garden Mentors – 500 adults educated 12,000 students in pre-K – 12. Many teachers are interested in butterfly and pollinator gardens. Also have a lot of public education events (project open house, symposium, East Farm spring Festival). RI Native Plant Guide developed through cooperative extension, allows the user to enter information about their site and then get a list of species that will work on site. Also have digital media outreach. URI educated 15 – 16 K clients in 2016. Master Gardeners do an end of year client survey to explore whether behaviors have been changed. In 2016, 1,000 clients were surveyed, 20% return rate.

Specific pollinator programs: 1) plant selection, 2) cultural practices – use of pesticides. Symposium – Gardening with a Purpose included a focus on pollinators. East Farm Festival included a learning walkway that had a focus on pollinator conservation demonstrations and pollinator plant displays. The school garden conference at East Farm Demo Garden attracted 100 attendees. School gardens are encouraged to focus on pollinators – food growing doesn't work well with the school schedule.

The Newport Harbor Walk includes dingy planters that showcase Rhody Native plants and pollinators. Have tours and have a good web presence.

Future education efforts: 1) School gardens – could be providing more native plants and do more pollinator plantings. 2) Focus area – concentration internal training, volunteer efforts and partnerships in a strategic way to really change behavior and conditions on the ground. Selected Land Stewardship for focus 2017 – 2019. Goals, 1) recognize URI Coop Extension as science based resource, 2) preserve biodiversity and pollinators, 3) conserve water and soil resources, 4) Reduce pesticide use.

Goal – preserve biodiversity and pollinators –

- plant natives,
- avoid invasives,
- habitat for pollinators

Volunteer Training in 2017

April 27 --Education on Pollinator Conservation – Scott MacIvor

May 23 – MG meeting at 6 PM - Pollinator Working Group recommendations.

Reduce Pesticide Use (Integrated Pest Management)

Behaviors

- ID diseases and pest before taking action
- Choosing the right plant for the right place
- Use alternatives to pesticides when ever possible

Q. Terry Meyer is a Master Gardiner and testified about how terrific the program is.

Q. Is there a role for Master Gardeners in citizen science?

A. Master Gardeners is interested but is seeking resources. Meg encouraged making connections with Cathy Sparks at DEM.

Q. Gary will send us a document on organic pesticides and which ones are dangerous to bees. US F&W is investing in school habitats.

James Murphy, RI College Sustainability Coordinator - An overview of RI College's beekeeping program

Jim came on 6 years ago as sustainability coordinator for the College. Some retiring professors donated hives to the College. College hosts the beekeeper courses, which are also hosted at URI.

Geoff Stilwell – RI Bee Survey Update. The study is looking at the small hive beetle. The objectives were to survey honey bee populations, monitor the health, track the presence of the small hive beetles and develop an on line database.

The surveys are before and after the growing season, collecting hive debris through the screened bottom board. Samples are collected every 2 weeks, and counts are made of small hive beetles and varroa mites.

Findings. Small hive beetles are widespread in RI by August. Find that the beetles are primarily in the urban areas (Prov and North Prov), almost not existent on the western border.

Q. what does small hive beetle do to a hive.

A. It stresses the hives. In the south it is a major problem.

Q. Is it a problem to native bees

A. We are not sure

Dr. Stillwell's theory is that the beetles are coming to RI in the packages of bees.

RIC Bee Education Center. RIC has 3 hives. Audience is K – 16. The Education center is a partnership with Aperion Institute and Down City Design. Last year, 800 students from Providence schools came through the education center. RIC's new web site will include a webcam focused on the hive.

RIC also hosts the Bee Keepers intermediate class which is a one-day hands on classes.

Freshman seminar – puts students into groups to answer specific questions. Also have a pollinator garden next to the hives.

Also have a student who is putting in a raised bed vegetable garden as her capstone senior project.

Q. Do you know how many schools have bee hives

A. Not many. Meadow Brook Waldorf School has hives. Penfield School.

Q. There is interest in urban beekeeping. Is there a concern with urban hives with the beetles?

A. We don't know. Urban areas are good because there are lower levels of pesticides.

Working Group Discussion

The group made the follow recommendations:

- We should write our plan directed at state plans
- Scott McIver's research identifies issues with nests for solitary bees. Artificial nest structures can become full of pests. NRCS prefers to recommend natural materials rather than created habitat.
- The Xerces Society is just finishing a report on cover/smother crops. It is not available for public review, but should be available in the next couple of weeks.
- It is worth highlighting the progress we have made from a year ago.
- The report should ask for an extension of the group.

Adjourn Meeting: 6:50 PM