

The Greater Atlanta Pollinator Partnership: A model for urban pollinator conservation

Summary: Global pollinator populations are in decline for many reasons including habitat loss and overuse of pesticides. The Greater Atlanta Pollinator Partnership (GAPP) was initiated in 2009, in Atlanta, Georgia because the housing boom of the 1990s and early 2000s resulted in the loss of 55 acres/day of green space. Over 20 - years, approximately 400,000 acres of pollinator-friendly native green space/tree canopy have been lost with an increase of 200,000 acres of impervious surface. Goals of the GAPP are to encourage restoration, development, and registration of pollinator habitat at an ecologically significant landscape scale. Consequently, our project focuses on a 25-mile radius area around downtown Atlanta that comprises nearly 1.2 million acres of potential pollinator habitat and includes all major public lands and thousands of individual residences. Our efforts focus on restoring pollinator-friendly habitat and educating the public through formal and informal programs. Key components of the GAPP include using native species when available, rescuing native plants from construction sites, controlling invasive species, establishing community gardens, citizen science projects, conservation, education, research, and website development. The GAPP website (<http://gapp.org/>) is critical to our online garden registration and mapping to track garden establishment, assess habitat development trends, provide online educational materials, and provide focus to the effort through a newsletter. Several organizations have expressed interest in using the GAPP as a model for their citizen-based pollinator conservation efforts. For example, the Cincinnati Nature Center will use the GAPP model for pollinator conservation in metropolitan Cincinnati, Ohio, through their "Milkweeds to Monarchs" initiative. Funding for the GAPP is limited, so synergy through partnerships is the key to success.

Historical Context: Between 1990 and 2010, U.S. Census data indicate the population in the metro-Atlanta area increased by nearly 2.4 million people, resulting in the loss of nearly 400,000 acres of tree canopy/green space and an increase in pesticide use. Atlanta is on a monarch butterfly migration route and restoring habitat connectivity is essential.

Agency Priorities: Youth, Urban Conservation, and the Administration's pollinator initiative.

Partnership Development: In 2009, the Regional Forester stated she wanted a pollinator garden in Atlanta, but provided no sideboards. We met with a key partner and developed the conceptual framework for a 1.2 million acre urban pollinator conservation program. Everyone we talked to after this wanted to be part of the partnership.

Partnership Goals: Develop a public-private partnership to plant pollinator-friendly habitat in a 1.2 million acre focal area. To date, more than 300 individual gardens have been registered including more than 130 school gardens established to function as

outdoor classrooms so students can understand the role of pollinators in food production.

Lessons Learned and Keys to Success: The biggest lesson and key to success is having a functional website before trying to launch a new partnership of this magnitude. It took almost two years for Georgia State University to build the online mapping component of the website. We started marketing the GAPP well before the completion of the website and we had nowhere to send the public when they asked for our web address. <http://gapp.org/> is now fully functional with a mapping component that can map world-wide. Another key to success is keeping the effort focused and local, in our case a 25-mile radius.

Partnership Expansion: The GAPP model can be exported anywhere and NFS, S&PF, R&D, and International Programs can all play a role. There is interest in expanding the effort in GA state-wide, as well as to Cincinnati, OH and Raleigh, NC. Ideally, a dedicated staff person could be available to make this partnership really expand, but that is not in our current capacity. WO leadership could encourage Regional Foresters to establish similar partnerships in their communities and the WO could take the lead in initiating a partnership in DC, once established it could be led by any number of non-profit organizations.

Key Partners: *Formal:* Atlanta Botanical Garden, National Wildlife Federation, Greening Youth Foundation, US EPA, Keeping it Wild, and Ford Elementary School. *Informal:* GA Highlands College, GA State University, GA Tech, University of GA, Emory University, Spelman College, Captain Planet Foundation, Beech Hollow Wildflower Farm, Lost Mountain Nursery, Blue Heron Nature Preserve, Chattahoochee Nature Center, Cochran Mill Nature Center, Davidson – Arabia Mountain Nature Preserve, Monarch Across Georgia, South Fork Conservancy, West Atlanta Watershed Alliance, Farmer D Organics, Atlanta Public Schools, Cobb County School District, Fulton County Department of Water Resources, Providence Missionary Baptist Church, Trees Atlanta, Truly Living Well Center for Natural Urban Agriculture, Georgia Native Plant Society, Marietta Gardeners Club, Smith – Gilbert Gardens, Pollinator Partnership, Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation and more than 300 individuals that registered their gardens.

Cash and In-kind Contributions: *Formal partnerships:* FS non-cash = \$8,000; Cash to cooperators = \$122,000 of which \$47,000 was FS. EPA gave FS \$75,000 through IA and Captain Planet Foundation donated \$10,000. Non-cash and in-kind from partners = \$124,200. *Informal partnerships:* Estimate \$400,000 + in in-kind contributions over last 4 years.

Special Authorities: None were utilized.