

ITC COMMITS 98,000 ACRES TO MONARCH BUTTERFLY HABITAT

**VOLUNTARY FEDERAL PROGRAM PROTECTS DECLINING POLLINATORS;
ACRES LOCATED IN SIX STATES ACROSS MIDWEST REGION**



In keeping with a longtime commitment to conservation efforts and good land stewardship for the communities it serves, ITC has enrolled 98,000 acres across six states in a federal program to protect and grow habitat for the threatened monarch butterfly.

The monarch butterfly is an important pollinator that has seen drastic population losses over the past 20 years — by as much as 80% for eastern populations of the butterfly and a shocking 99% for western populations. This isn't just bad news for the butterflies. Pollinators are necessary to more than a third of crop production.

In response to this decline, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service has taken proactive measures and created a nationwide Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances (CCAA) designed to engage energy companies like ITC in vital conservation efforts that benefit the monarch butterfly. The voluntary program establishes consistent conservation measures and provides regulatory certainty for participating landowners.



“At ITC, we always want to do the right thing. With this program, we can make a difference in our communities by engaging in efforts to restore and protect the monarch butterfly population.”

— ITC Environmental Manager Mike McNulty

WHAT IS A CCAA?

A CCAA is a formal agreement to address the conservation needs of at-risk species before they become listed as threatened or endangered under the Federal Endangered Species Act. Landowners voluntarily commit to conservation measures that help stabilize or restore the species with the goal that an endangered listing will become unnecessary.

ITC is an ideal candidate for the monarch CCAA program because the company maintains large strips of land in rights-of-way, or easements, for its electric transmission lines. In fact, ITC was one of the first dozen utilities to apply and was recently accepted after a yearlong application process.

“The landscape-scale restoration work ITC is doing to establish and enhance pollinator habitat on utility corridors is essential to the survival of monarchs, plus it will support many other conservation values,” said Lisa Hein, Senior Director for Conservation Programs for the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation. “We appreciate ITC’s leadership and believe the proactive measures will encourage others to take similar action.”



FOR THE GREATER GRID.

The utility is committed to implementing conservation measures that will serve to benefit monarch butterfly habitat on a minimum of 42 percent of its enrolled lands on an annual basis. This far exceeds the 18 percent as required by the CCAA. The locations and number of enrolled ITC acres are wide-reaching and will have a significant beneficial impact for monarch butterflies:

ITC MIDWEST

Iowa – 38,600 acres

Minnesota – 3,400 acres

Illinois – 1,100 acres

ITC MICHIGAN

Michigan – 49,600 acres

ITC GREAT PLAINS

Kansas – 5,200 acres

Oklahoma – 400 acres

“Saving the monarch requires a collective effort to provide habitat on the landscape,” said Sean P. Sweeney, Fish and Wildlife Biologist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. “We welcome the participation of ITC in the Nationwide Candidate Conservation Agreement for Monarch Butterfly on Energy and Transportation Lands. ITC joins a growing group of businesses and agencies dedicated to securing the future of the monarch by creating and conserving habitat along rights of way across the country.”

The land is largely rural because it can better sustain large populations of monarchs. Cropland, medium-intensity development and urban spaces were ruled out, as these land uses are not likely to contain any meaningful monarch habitat.

“These 98,000 acres all have potential for monarch habitat. While these acres are already being managed according to best vegetation management practices, we will now also manage for monarch habitat,” said McNulty.

That means timing seasonal mowing so it doesn’t affect the monarch breeding season, selective herbicide spraying and brush removal, developing more grassland and prairie habitat, seeding and planting, and letting the land rest, too.

The CCAA also requires regular monitoring and reporting on monarch habitat and populations on these acres. For example, field crews will collect data on the amount of milkweed — vital vegetation for monarch butterfly habitat for its nectar and as a host for eggs.

A HISTORY OF GOOD STEWARDSHIP

Participation in the monarch butterfly CCAA is the latest milestone in a long history of ITC action and financial support for pollinators and their habitats.

These efforts include converting turfgrass in transmission corridors and at substations into diverse native prairie plantings, the installation of rain gardens with native plants at warehouses in Iowa and Michigan, and the cultivation of pollinator gardens at the company’s environmental award-winning headquarters in Michigan.

In addition, the environmental team is involved in the Cedar Rapids, Iowa-based Monarch Research Project, The 1,000 Acre Pollinator Initiative, The Iowa Monarch Conservation Consortium and Monarch Watch. In addition to monarch specific efforts, ITC is an active member of the Wildlife Habitat Council with 14 sites enrolled in the Conservation Certification Program as well as a member of the Midwest Rights-of-Way as Habitat Working Group.

Many of these conservation efforts provide an opportunity to develop government, corporate and community partnerships and to work together on environmental solutions that are good for everyone in the community.