

A Crash Course in Planning Conservation Plantings or Wildlife and Pollinators

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Insects, especially pollinating species, are ecologically and economically important but many species are declining across the United States. The duty of fish and wildlife agencies to manage for insects can be unclear based on existing charters, which can make obtaining funding or capacity to directly address these declines difficult. By factoring these species into current habitat management practices, natural resource agency staff can leverage existing capacity to benefit these species. Conservation plantings of grasses and forbs are regularly conducted for reasons such as soil health, erosion control, livestock forage, upland game bird and waterfowl nesting, and grassland songbird habitat. Incorporating pollinator habitat needs is relatively easy when designing these projects. As an example of existing agency potential to benefit pollinator species, in just the last two years Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks' Upland Game Bird Enhancement Program administered over 5,300 acres, and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service's Environmental Quality Incentives Program separately administered over 42,000 acres of conservation grass and forb plantings on private lands throughout Montana. Each agency also has multiple other programs under which this work occurs. This presentation will explore how to conduct conservation plantings to achieve multiple natural resource benefits including a basic planning process, resources for planning, specific considerations for benefiting pollinators when designing seed mixes, and a review of some existing cost-share programs available to implement these practices on public or private lands.