

Final Report 2021

Strategic Roadmap

Expanding Pollinator Habitat on Utility and
Transportation Rights-of-Way across the
Chicago Region

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Introduction

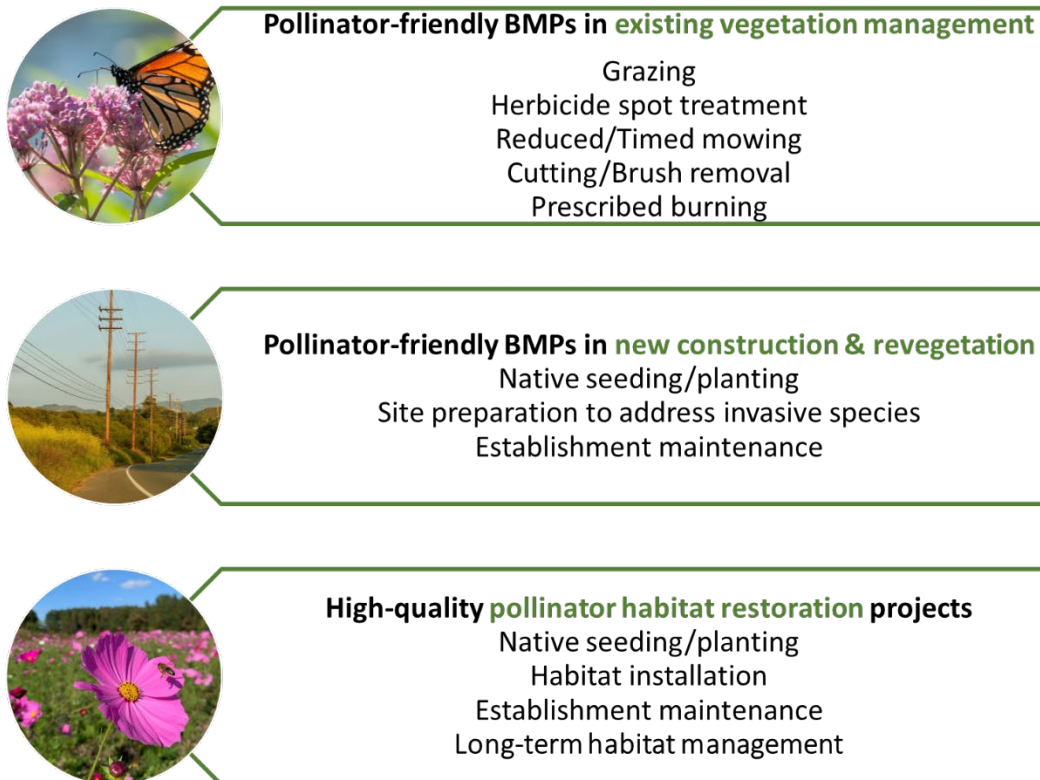
When managed with wildlife in mind, utility and transportation lands can provide valuable habitat resources for a variety of species. They often crisscross highly developed or managed landscapes where they can offer refugia and greater biodiversity than the surrounding areas or connect favorable habitats across an otherwise fragmented landscape. In particular, linear rights-of-way (ROW) span the entirety of the U.S. and are commonly managed to promote low-growing, early successional habitat, which is generally compatible with utility and transportation infrastructure maintenance. Increasingly, a suite of management techniques known as Integrated Vegetation Management (IVM) are used to promote the presence of beneficial vegetation on ROW that can support at-risk species, such as insect pollinators, that are threatened due to habitat loss.

There are already numerous efforts in the Chicago region aimed at utilizing ROWs and other utility and transportation lands for habitat conservation. Utility companies, highway managers, solar developers, and railroads in the greater Chicago area have all partnered to some degree with conservation organizations, forest preserves, nature centers, municipalities, and/or other government agencies on conservation projects of varying scales. Some of these organizations have decades-long habitat restoration programs, while others have mostly engaged in voluntary conservation at a distance or only recently begun looking at IVM and other pollinator-friendly habitat practices. Chicago Wilderness, a regional alliance of more than 250 organizations, recently prioritized conservation on ROW under its Goal #3, which plans to increase native landscaping and green infrastructure on 84,000 acres of built-up landscapes in the Chicago region by 2025.

The Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Foundation (GDFF) also recognized the value of ROWs as conservation corridors in its *Expanding the Conservation Toolbox* report. The goal of this strategic roadmap study was to build upon the corridor-related strategies identified by the GDFF and engage conservation organizations, public and private landowners, and utility and transportation organizations (ROW organizations) to identify opportunities for collaboration and habitat conservation on ROWs and other utility and transportation lands spanning the Chicago region. Over the past year, the Energy Resources Center at the University of Illinois Chicago (the Team) worked with participating organizations to determine current barriers and impediments, opportunities, and incentives for carrying out habitat-related goals as well as improving and expanding current habitat initiatives on utility and transportation lands. Given the strong current interest in pollinator conservation, the analysis focused primarily on pollinator habitat.

For the purpose of framing the strategic roadmap study, pollinator habitat practices were divided into three activity categories: existing (or routine) vegetation management, post-construction establishment or revegetation, and high-quality pollinator habitat restoration projects as shown in Figure 1 below. ROW organizations can use IVM and other Best Management Practices (BMPs) to create and steward beneficial vegetation for pollinators. These BMPs can include reduced or timed mowing, herbicide spot treatment (as opposed to broadcast herbicide treatment), grazing, prescribed burning, and native seeding. In addition, organizations may choose to restore high-quality pollinator habitat in certain locations to support conservation goals.

Figure 1. Types of pollinator habitat practices on utility and transportation lands



Summary of Study Activities

To begin the analysis, the Team used the Rights-of-Way as Habitat Working Group, an international effort focused on promoting habitat on utility and transportation ROWs, to identify organizations that are currently involved and/or interested in habitat creation on utility and transportation lands in the Chicago area. The list consisted of conservation organizations, large public and private landowners, contractors, and ROW organizations. In addition, Chicago Wilderness helped the Team identify additional Chicago-area participants, particularly conservation organizations and landowners, who might be interested in partnering on or supporting ROW habitat projects.

From the list of prospective interested participants, the Team contacted 78 potential participants to introduce the study and conduct a preliminary survey to gauge their interest in participating in the development of the strategic roadmap and gather information on their current operating locations and current and future pollinator habitat initiatives. Twenty-four responses were filed, and 22 organizations indicated their interest in continued participation in the strategic road-mapping exercise. The organizations involved in the study are listed in Appendix A.

Following the initial survey, the Team created a more targeted secondary survey for three separate stakeholder groups: ROW organizations, conservation partners, and public/private landowners. The secondary surveys gathered additional information from eight ROW organizations, ten conservation

organizations, and four public/private landowners about past, current, and future pollinator habitat projects on utility and transportation lands.

The survey for ROW organizations generally categorized pollinator habitat activities into the three categories described above and respondents indicated the approximate scale of these activities on their systems. ROW organizations also shared if/how contractors were used, the amount of internal support there was for pollinator habitat initiatives, whether the projects were considered successful, and if there were public awareness campaigns about their pollinator habitat work. ROW organizations also detailed specific barriers they experienced in implementing pollinator-friendly BMPs and habitat restoration projects, and the underlying causes behind them. In addition, ROW organizations identified what types of opportunities would be the most impactful to increase their habitat efforts, including how collaboration with conservation organizations and large public/private landowners could be most effective. ROW organizations also shared potential incentives to help prioritize habitat creation and conservation on their lands.

Conservation groups and public/private landowners (partner organizations) each responded to similar questions in the secondary surveys, providing further detail on ongoing and past habitat projects they supported on utility and transportation lands, the roles they played in these collaborations, barriers they encountered, and opportunities to support future habitat conservation work. In addition, these partner organizations were asked how they could help address common barriers identified by ROW organizations. Similarly, partner organizations selected which opportunities and incentives identified by ROW organizations they could best support and champion.

Once all the survey results were compiled, stakeholder groups were convened for small group discussions to review the results and consider the implications. The ROW organizations were first convened as their own small group, followed by a combined group of conservation organizations and public/private landowners. A final collaborative meeting was held with all stakeholders to review the suggestions and recommendations on next steps. There was general consensus among the participating stakeholders on the recommended next steps to continue collaboration and support future habitat conservation on utility and transportation lands, as described further in this strategic roadmap report.

Findings

Current State of Pollinator Habitat Practices on Utility and Transportation Lands in the Chicago Region

Of the eight ROW organizations that responded to the survey, roughly two-thirds had adopted pollinator habitat goals and targets. The formal and informal goals and targets included commitments to restore a specific number of acres of habitat, develop an organizational biodiversity statement, adopt IVM and other BMPs, and/or enroll in the nationwide monarch butterfly Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances¹. The approximate percentage of lands where BMPs are implemented as well as the current scale of acres restored with high-quality pollinator habitat are listed in Table 1 below.

¹ <http://rightofway.erc.uic.edu/national-monarch-ccaa/>

Table 1. Scale of pollinator habitat practices on utility and transportation lands in the Chicago region

ROW Organization Respondent	Percent of lands treated with reduced/time d mowing	Percent of lands treated with targeted herbicides	Percent of lands treated with prescribed burning	Percent of lands treated with brush removal	Acres of high- quality restored pollinator habitat
Indiana DOT	75 - 100%	75 - 100%	-	75 - 100%	200 - 500
Illinois DOT	< 50%	< 50%	-	< 50%	100 - 200
Illinois Tollway	< 25%	< 10%	< 25%	-	200 - 500
ComEd	-	75 - 100%	< 10%	75 - 100%	200 - 500
NiSource / NIPSCO	< 10%	75 - 100%	-	75 - 100%	200 - 500
Nicor Gas	-	-	-	-	200 - 500
Metropolitan Water Reclamation District	-	-	-	-	< 10
CN Railroad	-	-	-	-	-

Across the five respondents currently using pollinator-friendly BMPs, the use of targeted herbicides to minimize impacts to beneficial plant species and target invasive or incompatible plant species is the most common conservation practice, followed closely by brush removal to promote beneficial early successional vegetation. Mowing at specific intervals to accommodate blooming periods and promote other pollinator habitat resources is primarily used by transportation agencies. Some organizations are currently experimenting with prescribed burning on portions of their systems. Most organizations reported voluntarily creating or restoring between 200 and 500 acres of high-quality pollinator habitat on their lands.

Both utilities and transportation agencies have similar approaches to determine how and when to implement pollinator-friendly BMPs and pollinator habitat restoration projects. Not surprisingly, most organizations prioritize implementation of BMPs and habitat restoration projects in conjunction with construction or ground-disturbing activities. They also often consider partner support from landowners and/or conservation organizations as well as proximity to other habitat. Pollinator-friendly BMPs and habitat restoration projects are more commonly located on lands owned by the ROW organization, instead of on easements with private properties or public lands.

When asked about internal buy-in around pollinator habitat-related initiatives, the ROW organizations ranked the level of support from field staff as an average of 2.8 on a five-point scale and the level of support from their management team as 3.5 on a five-point scale. More than half of the organizations had public outreach campaigns about pollinator conservation and reported positive public relations

related to these initiatives. Outreach activities ranged from news articles and social media posts to distributing mailers and handouts to public engagement events.

Most of the ROW organizations that had ongoing habitat projects utilized contractors; however, the Team did not receive any responses from contractors on the survey. Of the conservation organizations and public/private landowner respondents, the majority had recently engaged in habitat work on utility and transportation lands. The surveys asked both ROW organizations and partner organizations about their history of collaboration with each other and their interest in future partnerships. Just under half the ROW organizations indicated they already partner directly with Chicago-area public and private organizations or landowners on habitat projects, though all respondents indicated they would be interested in future collaborations.

Landowners reported supporting ROW organizations predominantly through technical expertise, planning, installation/restoration, and management/maintenance, while conservation partners supported ROW organizations through technical expertise, planning, and financial contributions. All partner organizations rated their collaborations with ROW organizations on habitat projects as successful. ROW organizations considered collaboration with conservation organizations and public/private landowners a key component of successful expansion of habitat efforts on utility and transportation lands.

Barriers to Implementing Pollinator Habitat Practices

ROW organizations ranked their top barriers to creating or managing pollinator habitat on utility and transportation lands. The top three barriers identified were:

- higher upfront costs,
- lack of knowledgeable staff and contractors, and
- lack of internal management support.

When asked to explain which aspect of the higher costs was the biggest challenge, survey respondents scored both higher (or uncertain) costs of native seed mixes compared to conventional seed mixes and uncertain costs associated with changes in vegetation management equally. Related to lack of knowledgeable staff and contractors, survey respondents indicated that a lack of technical expertise about how to identify and maintain native species was that largest hurdle. Even though management support for pollinator-habitat initiatives was identified as a top barrier, as noted above, the average perceived support from management teams ranked higher on average than from field staff. Table 2 below presents all the barriers selected by ROW organizations alongside which barriers partner organizations indicated they could help resolve.

Table 2: Implementation barriers by ROW and partner organizations (in ranked order)

Barriers ROW organizations identified	Barriers conservation organizations can address	Barriers landowners can address
Higher upfront costs	Lack of general public support	Lack of knowledgeable staff or contractors
Lack of knowledgeable staff or contractors	Lack of knowledgeable staff or contractors	Uncertainty about long-term management requirements
Lack of internal management support	Challenges managing invasive species	Challenges managing invasive species
Lack of general public support	Lack of internal management support	Lack of general public support
Management of invasive species	Logistics of changing practices at large-scale	Uncertainty about long-term costs
Uncertainty about long-term management requirements	Concern about negative wildlife impacts (e.g., wildlife-vehicle collisions)	Concern about negative wildlife impacts (e.g., wildlife-vehicle collisions)
Safety concerns		

In the initial meeting with ROW organizations, the topic of knowledgeable staff and contractors gained the most traction. Six of the eight ROW respondents had some experience working with contractors who were trained or specialized in pollinator-friendly BMPs or habitat restoration. In some of these contracts there is language related to habitat, though several ROW organizations indicated there are current limitations, which make working with new or specialized contractors difficult.

It was generally agreed that training, particularly focused on invasive versus desirable plant species is an important factor for front-line habitat managers. Implementing BMPs to tackle invasive species is critical to the success of pollinator habitat. The group recognized that after initial vegetation establishment, there is often a gap in continued management to ensure the pollinator habitat is well-maintained. Participants noted that this may provide an opportunity to coordinate with the conservation and agricultural sectors to design and implement better management plans and help drive down costs for pollinator-friendly BMPs and habitat restoration projects.

In addition, conservation organizations and public/private landowners were asked to identify the barriers they experienced when partnering with ROW organizations to create and conserve pollinator habitat. Conservation partners predominantly indicated a lack of internal support from within ROW organizations, while also experiencing budget constraints, differences in conservation practices, and a lack of support from nearby landowners. By comparison, landowners reported experiencing budget constraints, poor coordination and communication between partners, and changes in leadership within the ROW organizations as the primary barriers. Partners noted a lack of information about existing habitat projects on ROWs and trouble identifying the correct contact to work with at ROW organizations, which made it difficult to promote or engage in these initiatives.

Incentives & Opportunities to Increase Pollinator Habitat Initiatives

In their surveys, ROW organizations ranked incentives or drivers to expand pollinator habitat initiatives on utility and transportation lands. The most commonly selected incentives were:

- getting “credit” for pollinator-friendly vegetation management in public sustainability reporting,
- contract specifications for pollinator-friendly BMPs,
- cost-benefit analyses for pollinator-friendly BMPs, and
- a formal organizational-level commitment and goals related to pollinator habitat.

Table 3 below presents the most impactful factors that were selected for each of the three categories of pollinator habitat activities. In a separate set of survey questions, ROW organizations overwhelmingly indicated that “recognition” was the most important form of support that could be provided by partner organizations, followed by help managing, maintaining, or monitoring the habitat over time, and conducting public outreach.

Table 3: Top factors to increase adoption of pollinator habitat initiatives (in ranked order)

Factors to increase the adoption of pollinator-friendly BMPs in existing vegetation management	Factors to increase the adoption of pollinator-friendly BMPs in new construction and revegetation	Factors to increase the adoption of high-quality pollinator habitat restoration projects
Getting “credit” for pollinator friendly vegetation management in public sustainability reporting	An organizational level commitment and goals related to pollinator habitat	Getting “credit” for pollinator friendly vegetation management in public sustainability reporting
Positive public recognition for pollinator initiatives	Contract specifications for pollinator friendly BMPs	Positive public recognition for pollinator initiatives
Outreach materials to build buy-in from organization’s leadership	Cost-benefit analysis for pollinator friendly BMPs	Third-party habitat accreditation program or certificate opportunities
Regulatory assurances for potentially listed species	Getting “credit” for pollinator friendly vegetation management in public sustainability reporting	Regulatory assurances for potentially listed species
Cost-benefit analysis for pollinator friendly BMPs	Financial incentives to offset higher costs	Grants or cost-share to offset restoration costs
	Positive public recognition for pollinator initiatives	

Similarly, partner organizations were given a list of possible ways to help ROW organizations implement additional pollinator habitat and were asked to indicate which they could best support. The majority of the conservation organizations indicated they could help facilitate partnerships to implement pollinator habitat projects or BMPs, generate greater public awareness about ROW organizations’ pollinator habitat initiatives, and provide outreach materials to build buy-in within the organization. All landowner respondents indicated they could also generate greater public awareness about ROW habitat projects in addition to providing technical guidance on habitat restoration or pollinator-friendly BMPs. Most landowners also noted that they could provide suitable land on which habitat could be created or

restored and well as publicly recognize ROW habitat projects. For comparison, Table 4 below presents the top opportunities identified by each stakeholder group.

Table 4: Top opportunities identified by ROW and partner organizations (in ranked order)

Opportunities identified by ROW organizations	Opportunities conservation organizations can address	Opportunities landowners can address
Recognition for pollinator habitat initiatives	Facilitating partnerships to implement pollinator habitat projects or BMPs	Providing technical guidance on creating or restoring pollinator habitat and/or implementing pollinator-friendly BMPs
Help managing or maintaining habitat over time	Generating greater public awareness about pollinators and conservation to build support for the organization's work	Generating greater public awareness about pollinators and conservation to build support for the organization's work
Help monitoring habitat over time	Helping to identify and prioritize habitat opportunities on the organization's system	Providing suitable land on which pollinator habitat could be created or restored
Assistance with public outreach	Publicly recognizing the organization for its pollinator habitat initiatives	Publicly recognizing the organization for its pollinator habitat initiatives

During the stakeholder conversations, the importance of increased recognition opportunities for ROW organizations that implement pollinator habitat initiatives was further noted as a key factor to support future work. Participants identified the high value provided by national awards and shared story-telling as well as the associated benefits to existing conservation strategies, environmental justice work, and ecotourism in the region. Throughout these conversations, potential alignment with numerous regional and national efforts was noted:

- Chicago Wilderness Green Vision goals²
- The Field Museum's Urban Monarch & Pollinator Conservation Network³
- Calumet-area Conservation Action Plans⁴
- Illinois Monarch Action Plan and the Route 66 Monarch Flyway⁵
- Indiana Dunes Ecosystem Alliance Strategic Framework⁶
- Friends of the Chicago River's Wildlife Connectivity Framework⁷
- U.S. Department of the Interior's America the Beautiful plan⁸

² <https://www.chicagowilderness.org/page/OurVision>

³ <https://www.fieldmuseum.org/science/research/area/keller-science-action-center/science-action-chicago/monarchs-view-city>

⁴ https://savedunes.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/CAP-Report-10.3.18_Small-PDF.pdf

⁵ <https://illinoisroute66.org/route-66-monarch-flyway/>

⁶ <https://savedunes.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Save-the-Dunes-IDEA-Plan.pdf>

⁷ https://s3.amazonaws.com/chicagoriver/var/www/focr/releases/20200911193716/public/ckeditor_assets/attachments/814/Friends_of_the_Chicago_River_Wildlife_Conservation_and_Landscape_Restoration_Framework_Plan.pdf

⁸ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/01/27/executive-order-on-tackling-the-climate-crisis-at-home-and-abroad/>

Participants observed the success of these programs and the frameworks they offered to engage more directly with ROW organizations on habitat initiatives. Since most ROW organizations have tended to focus their habitat conservation efforts on the lands they own, finding collaborative opportunities to extend this work to adjacent lands or easements is a practical next step.

Discussions also highlighted opportunities to help ROW organizations locate habitat projects where they have the highest likelihood of succeeding, taking into consideration ecological value, community engagement and needs assessments, and long-term management potential. Since proximity to other habitat could be an important determining factor for where to prioritize both pollinator-friendly BMPs and habitat restoration projects, the Rights-of-Way as Habitat Working's Group Geospatial Database⁹ was noted as an option to share data on where and how pollinator habitat is being managed. Many of the ROW organizations involved in the study are already participating in the Geospatial Database. It is also worth noting that the Rights-of-Way as Habitat Working Group has a separate ongoing project evaluating the feasibility of developing a cost-benefit calculator for pollinator-friendly practices on ROWs. The feasibility study is expected to be completed in February 2022.

Lastly, participants discussed the opportunity to strengthen collaborative relationships between ROW organizations, conservation groups, and public/private landowners. This could be done by providing mechanisms to share information more easily about habitat projects, training resources, and outreach materials; helping partners connect with the right champions in ROW organizations; and finding ways to amplify each other's work. Participants agreed that with the right tools and opportunities to connect and learn from each other, habitat related initiatives on ROW would become more common and sustainable over time. The Team compiled case studies around the U.S. and Canada which were referenced as similar successful initiatives to consider for future next steps (see Appendix B).

Recommendations

The surveys and stakeholder conversations resulted in several proposed recommendations to support additional habitat on utility and transportation lands in the Chicago region. These recommendations were further refined during the final stakeholder meeting. Though other important barriers and opportunities were noted during the strategic road-mapping process, the below recommendations were prioritized by stakeholders based on what they believed were important foundational steps and/or could be reasonably achieved in the short-term.

1. Chicago-area work group for habitat on utility and transportation lands

Coordinating a Chicago-area work group will provide a convening point for ROW organizations and partners in the region to share information, build capacity, and track and showcase their successes with habitat projects. The work group should build upon the existing framework of the Chicago Wilderness ROW project team to connect ROW managers, partner organizations, and related initiatives across the Chicago region. To facilitate active collaboration, participants of the work group would meet at least on a semi-annual basis to share updates on projects, challenges, lessons, and

⁹ <http://rightofway.erc.uic.edu/geospatial-database/>

opportunities to support each other's work. The work group would maintain a directory of contacts and champions at ROW and partner organizations as well as a database of ROW habitat projects and resources to support information sharing and direct coordination between partners.

2. Shared public relations effort to educate and engage the public and key stakeholders about habitat on utility and transportation lands

Building shared resources and common tools to communicate about ROW habitat projects will help ROW organizations tell their stories better and build broader recognition and support from internal and external stakeholders. The work group will work with a professional communications team to design an outreach and education campaign that can be used by both ROW organizations and their partners to showcase the value of ROW habitat projects, increase public awareness of these types of projects, create collaborative story-telling opportunities, and build local and national recognition. These messages and tools could also be used by ROW organizations to build internal support from management teams, vegetation managers, and contractors.

3. Prioritization strategy to focus collaborative habitat efforts across the Chicago region

While some ROW organizations in the region have existing strategies for locating habitat projects on their systems, a coordinated strategy across the region will provide a common focus for ROW organizations and their partners, encourage new and collaborative habitat projects, and more holistically consider ecological and social factors that may affect the success of habitat projects. The work group will build on existing mapping and prioritization efforts by Chicago Wilderness, the Rights-of-Way as Habitat Working Group, Friends of the Chicago River, and others to identify priority areas for ROW habitat projects in the region. A collaborative prioritization approach will support the creation and maintenance of habitat through logistical planning, landowner and public buy-in, long-term maintenance, and invasive species management. Prioritization criteria will be developed with consideration for ecosystem services and conservation value, community engagement potential, social vulnerability, municipal and regional planning objectives, partnership opportunities, and other ROW operations and management needs and opportunities.

The Team believes these recommendations are a natural continuation of current conservation efforts across the Chicago region and align with GDDF's strategic priorities. These steps will facilitate more efficient, effective, and collaborative conservation work on utility and transportation lands and serve as building blocks to address the more complex or challenging barriers and opportunities identified through this strategic roadmap process.

Appendix A: Strategic Roadmap Participants

Right-of-Way Organizations

- CN Railroad
- ComEd
- Illinois Department of Transportation
- Illinois Tollway
- Indiana Department of Transportation
- Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago
- Nicor Gas Company
- NiSource

Conservation Organizations

- Chicago Wilderness
- Field Museum
- Friends of the Chicago River
- Friends of the Forest Preserves
- National Park Service
- Natural Habitat Evanston
- Pollinator Partnership
- Prospect Heights Natural Resources Commission
- Save the Dunes
- The Chicago Zoological Society
- The Morton Arboretum
- Wildlife Habitat Council

Public/Private Landowners

- Chicago Park District
- Forest Preserves of Cook County
- Forest Preserve District of Kane County
- Forest Preserve District of Will County

Appendix B: Case Studies & Related Programs from Across the U.S. & Canada

The Team identified the following projects and programs from across the U.S. and Canada that can offer best practices and learning opportunities for collaborative ROW habitat work in the Chicago region.

Chicago Wilderness, Goal #3 - Green Infrastructure in Built Spaces

In 2019, Chicago Wilderness began plans for a renewed Green Vision, with a goal to engage people from all walks of life and with all habitats integrated in healthy nature throughout the entire Chicago Wilderness region in Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, and Wisconsin. By 2025, Chicago Wilderness aims to increase native landscaping and green infrastructure by 3% (or 84,000 acres) across the 2.8 million acres where people live, work, and commute. The priority areas include rights-of-way, corporate/industrial/school/university campuses, municipalities and residential areas, and tree canopy. For more information: <https://www.chicagowilderness.org/page/OurVision>

Seattle Green Line

The Seattle Green Line, previously an empty lot inhabited by invasive weeds, is a green space along a high-voltage transmission line corridor that helps maintain a biodiverse ecosystem within the City of Seattle, Washington. Publicly launched in fall 2018, the Green Line is a partnership between The Common Acre, Rainier Beach Action Coalition, Duwamish Alive Coalition, EarthCorps, and Seattle City Light. This green space gives the local community an opportunity to participate and maintain their neighborhood as an eco-friendly space. The project serves as a sustainable habitat case study that models how communities can repurpose industrial public spaces. For more information: <https://www.commonacre.org/the-green-line.html>

Toronto Meadoway

Concepts for the Toronto Meadoway began in 2012 and formally launched in April 2018 to transform a 16-kilometre stretch of hydroelectric corridor through Toronto, Ontario. The project is a partnership between the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, the Province of Ontario, and Hydro One. This project is expected to be completed by December 2024, providing a vibrant urban greenspace and meadowlands that will become one of Canada's largest linear urban parks. The Meadoway is open to the public, and people can interact with pollinators, birds, and wildflower species. For more information: <https://themeadoway.ca/>

Illinois Monarch Project Route 66 Monarch Flyway

The Route 66 Monarch Flyway was launched in November 2020 as part of the Illinois Monarch Project. The Monarch Flyway is a 66-mile wide corridor that stretches across Illinois, from Chicago to St. Louis, and along the historic Route 66 highway. The main focus of this project is to restore monarch habitat and engage individuals and organizations from across four sectors (urban,

agriculture, rights-of-ways, and natural lands) to help Illinois meet its statewide goal of 150 million milkweed stems by 2038. For more information: <https://illinoisroute66.org/route-66-monarch-flyway/>

Portland Pollinator Vision Plan

The Wind Seed Project is an ongoing plan that was launched in the winter of 2015. The focus of this project is to return native plants to main landscapes. The project is conducting research with the Conway School of Landscape Design on a city-wide pollinator corridor for Portland. This goal works to connect urban residents with nature on a daily basis. One unique aspect of this project is that it is youth focused because including youth provides the project with fresh ideas from a new generation. Youth involvement is crucial because they provide new perspectives and they are also leaders who may take on restoration projects of their own in the future. For more information: <https://wildseedproject.net/portland-pollinator-vision-plan>

Backyard Basecamp

The Backyard Basecamp is an ongoing program located in Baltimore, Maryland that aims to connect Black, Indigenous, and People of Color together to land and nature. This program was founded by Atiya Wells, a pediatric nurse that aims to connect families to outdoor spaces. The mission of this project is to increase the diversity in nature-based programming. Nature walks in Baltimore was one of the first activities led by the program. This program focuses on professional development, public speaking, village building, and garden consultation/ support. For more information: <https://backyardbasecamp.org/>

Appendix C: Meeting Minutes

Chicago Region Rights-of-Way as Habitat Potential Study | Utility and Transportation Meeting

Date: April 22, 2021

On April 22, 2021, utility and transportation organizations across the Chicago region convened to discuss habitat opportunities and barriers on rights-of-way (ROW). This discussion was prefaced by a survey gauging current habitat projects and management, barriers, opportunities, and incentives to creating and managing for habitat. Pollinator habitat, as defined by the Rights-of-Way as Habitat Working Group, is areas containing native flowering plants, host plants, and nesting sites, throughout the growing season.

For the purpose of framing the survey and discussion, pollinator habitat management is divided into three distinct categories: existing (or routine) vegetation management, post-construction establishment or revegetation, and high-quality pollinator habitat restoration projects.

The following is a summary of what was discussed, based on the survey results.

General Discussion | Pollinator Habitat Recap

- Nine survey responses, roughly 2/3 have pollinator habitat goals and targets at their organizations; those who do not are interested in adopting them.
 - The survey did not ask whether there had been changes in pollinator habitat goals or practices over time, and only focused on current goals and activities.
 - For future consideration, pollinator habitat progress over time could be more indicative of habitat commitments than current/ongoing habitat activities.
 - BMPs which are part of routine vegetation management are not always classified as “habitat practices” and therefore are more difficult to track in terms of cost, benefits, etc. than intentional restoration projects.

Barriers Discussion

- **Three top barriers identified in survey:**
 - Lack of knowledgeable staff
 - Higher upfront costs
 - Lack of internal support
- **Training is an important factor for habitat management.**
 - Key component for front line workers
 - Important to also address invasive species in IVM program. In addition to training, need contract specifications for promoting habitat.

- **What is the reality for shifting standards for new construction projects?**
 - Challenge: Once vegetation is installed, short term O&M plan is missing after establishment.
 - ROW sector has chance to coordinate with conservation and agriculture worlds, could potentially use this momentum across sectors to help drive costs down for restoration work.
- **Public sustainability reporting seems more relevant to utilities, but positive public recognition seems important to both utilities and DOTs.**

Opportunities & Incentives Discussion

- **Four top opportunities/incentives identified in survey:**
 - Getting “credit” for pollinator friendly vegetation management in public sustainability reporting
 - Positive public recognition for pollinator habitat initiatives
 - Outreach materials to build buy-in from organization’s leadership
 - Regulatory assurances for potentially listed species (HCPs, CCAAs, etc.)
- **Recognition is key**
 - National awards for DOTs are incredibly helpful.
 - Helps create ecotourism aspect to region through habitat work implemented.
- **Public campaign to build recognition**
 - Having collective regionalized support for publicizing what’s going on in ROWs would be helpful.
 -
- **Information sharing, creating top strategies, opportunities to work collectively.**
 - Some organizations are currently partnering with other conservation organizations who are using a variety of methods of public outreach and could be beneficial to expand upon.
 - Rather than try and reinvent wheel, connect with ongoing events to get word out.
 - Important to find additional/better opportunities to tell stories.
 - Use this group to align with CW to figure out how can we have targeted strategies and work with Donnelley to support collective goals and desired outcomes.
 - Chicago Wilderness could help tell stories as well.
- **What would you like to ask conservation organizations and public/private landowners?**
 - Are you interested in partnering with ROW orgs?
 - What are their barriers to collaboration with ROW orgs?

Chicago Region Rights-of-Way as Habitat Potential Study | ROW Partners Meeting

Date: June 2, 2021

On June 2, 2021, Conservation organizations and Public Landowners across the Chicago region convened to discuss habitat opportunities and barriers on rights-of-way (ROW). This discussion was prefaced by surveys to utility and transportation organizations, conservation organizations, and public and private landowners gauging current habitat projects and ongoing management, barriers, opportunities, and incentives to creating and managing for habitat. Pollinator habitat, as defined by the Rights-of-Way as Habitat Working Group, is areas containing native flowering plants, host plants, and nesting sites, throughout the growing season.

For the purpose of framing the survey and discussion, pollinator habitat management is divided into three distinct categories: existing (or routine) vegetation management, post-construction establishment or revegetation, and high-quality pollinator habitat restoration projects.

The following is a summary of what was discussed, based on the survey results.

General Discussion | Pollinator Habitat Recap

- 9 Survey responses, 7 conservation organizations, 3 public landowners; 4 with goals or targets related to pollinator habitat.
 - 6 of these organizations worked with utility and transportation organizations in the past to create or restore high-quality habitat.
 - Pollinator related projects were typically initiated by the partner organization and lasted between 3-5 years.

Existing Pollinator Initiatives and Barriers Discussion

- Survey findings generally align well with experiences of partner organizations.
- Recognition – important and something already working on. It would be helpful if there was list or website with all the ongoing ROW habitat projects to help us recognize them. Friends of the Chicago River has awards program, and this could be an opportunity to feature projects within the river system.
- [Name] agrees that ROW organizations are interested in recognition and getting credit for what they're reporting. Internal support that can be lacking – Upper management, doesn't really get it. Brokering new relationships and getting internal champions can be difficult, but that is where we have helped.
- Natural response, ROW not necessarily going with best habitat restoration, hoping to hold ROW managers to a better standard.
- Common ground between organizations that are having trouble getting support from up top. Synergies with getting community involvement as well. Challenges revolve around way story is told.
 - Questions about mowing and resistance to mowing. Social and civic aspect left out. Good to include story from all sides.

- Telling story about saving monarchs is also good for public and all parties involved, reducing herbicide and altering mowing. How do we show that this isn't negatively impacting employees, organization, etc.? Tell story to make it relevant to everyone.
- Programs and models for restoration work that shows community engagement/involvement (e.g., Conservation Corps) and employment opportunities is important to also demonstrate.
- Opportunity for ROW orgs to connect to environmental justice and how land restoration has multiple benefits, air quality, water quality, green spaces, etc.
- Any organizations working on those types of stories around pollinator conservation?
 - Yes, through white papers and featuring companies on social media.
 - ROWHWG has been beneficial to help tell story and show the benefit. But also, what can we do that would promote projects at all different scales – ComEd prairie projects, NiSource efforts through Indiana Dunes National parks.

Opportunities and Discussion – identifying easy next steps to take working with ROW partners

- Identify additional lands and priority areas
 - Utility and transportation lands encompass more than just the land immediately below/above the utility wires, ROWs often extend into forest and beyond. Something to consider when thinking about ecological diversity.
 - Build on existing mapping this group is doing and use that data. Compile information to make accessible what's going on and to identify gaps and opportunities.
 - Good to see where the overlapping opportunities happen on the ground. Forest preserves, Indiana Dunes Where ROWs interconnect. Mutual work and case studies, etc.
 - Friends is looking at how ROWs connect to forest preserves. Work with MWRD. Thinking about complexity of overlapping ownership and different rules for each organization.
 - Not all corridors are going to be used for future trails and connections. Once we identify corridors throughout the whole region.
- ROWs could be potentially public access to rivers etc. Thinking about community considerations, survey communities on what they want to see done on ROWs. This will also help increase recognition.
- Creating a coordination hub to help facilitate partnerships and implement projects.
 - Trying to help find funding, include ROW partners on grants and tying to public awareness, building upfront pollinator work with public facing project. Pollinator Landscape guide in Indiana Dune region.
 - Communities don't know who to contact at ROW organizations to get restoration projects started. Facilitating discussion, how to restore habitat.
 - Orgs may be able to only include certain contractors on ROWs. Other orgs can't help support on the ground work. Not initial installation, but ongoing management.
 - Share more of each other's work, amplify it. Get to know each other. Learning what each of you is working on. At regional level opportunistic, focused on performance, not thinking about large picture generally. Making sure word is out there for the work already done.
- Just helping to get ball rolling, helping reduce initial administration for ROW orgs.
 - Funding, paperwork, contracts, work on ground.
- What do you need from ROW organizations in order to be effective?

- Find real-estate person, helps make that contact.
- Once have contact, identify what sustainability looks like from their perspective. How to maintain work over time? Time, budget, details up front. So it's not so overwhelming.
- Biggest barriers for any work is funding – don't know how it could help increase funding. Identifying specific funding sources for specific type of work needs to be addressed before we can scale up work with ROW orgs. Funding for administrative funding on conservation org sides, and on the ground work.

Do you see value in participating in Chicago-area ROWHWG or equivalent?

- What is the status of Corporate Council of Chicago Wilderness? These are discussions we're having 15 years ago. Corporate Council is engaged in this work. Sara Race is chair and hoping to continue involvement.
- These conversations are already helpful. Working with companies would be helpful to broaden the scope of this work.
- Interesting to see the relationships with other platforms, e.g., City of Chicago, Rivers and Governance Task Force, urban and community forestry work within the industry. Lack of understanding of ag and utility forestry, land management needs from other industries.