



**Address to the MI House Agriculture Committee Regarding HB 4857
Marilyn Trent, City Council Member, City of Rochester
Founder Rochester Pollinators, a Committee of the Rochester City Beautiful Commission**

I founded the Rochester Pollinators, whose mission is to save the Monarch Butterfly because its population has declined by up to 90% in the last 30 years. Our mayor had signed the Mayor's Monarch Pledge, created by the National Wildlife Federation in 2014, to give cities and towns a guide with 29 actions to improve the Monarch's chances of survival. Today, with over 165 volunteers and over 6,000 milkweed plants given away, this year, the City of Rochester was designated Monarch Champion City by the National Wildlife Federation, which is only one of six in the nation.

I am excited to testify regarding the line item on HB4857 to delist milkweed (Latin name, Asclepius) as a noxious weed from city ordinances. Since 2019, in the work that I have done with hundreds of homeowners, I found that they are excited that they can contribute to biodiversity. Still, when milkweed is listed as a noxious weed, they run afoul of local weed ordinances. HB 48567 will be a positive step in remedying and supporting our homeowners in making a difference. The Federal and state do not recognize milkweed as a Noxious weed, so the counties and cities could easily follow.

The main issue is the need for more education on this topic.

1. When people learn of the decline of the Monarch and that all they need to do is plant milkweed, many will. When they know it's plant choice that kills the other pollinators and birds, they will choose Michigan native plants to integrate into their landscapes and gardens.
2. People think they see Monarch butterflies on their Butterfly Bush or other flowering plants, which is all they need to survive. It is quite the opposite. The adult butterfly can feed on the nectar of many plants (primarily native plants), but their offspring, the Monarch caterpillars, cannot eat every plant; they can only eat the leaves of pesticide-free milkweed plants to live. Milkweed is the host plant of the Monarch butterfly.
3. This "Host Plant" relationship is not unique to the Monarch. This is true of all the native Lepidoptera (Moths and Butterflies), of which 460 species are native to Michigan. That's why if we want to support biodiversity, we must keep those unique relationships of host plants and all caterpillars. By supporting caterpillars, we help the whole food web because caterpillars do the most to convert plant energy into animal energy in our local ecosystems.
4. Did you know that caterpillars have more protein than Beef? To quote the famous entomologist and author of Nature's Best Hope, Dr Doug Tallamy, "They are like thinly wrapped sausages to the birds who need to feed them to their babies as their number 1 food source.
5. Another reason to delist milkweed from the noxious weed list is that they support more than the Monarch butterfly. Still, many other insect species are integral to Michigan's natural ecosystem.
 - Milkweed bugs
 - Red milkweed beetles
 - Tussock moths,
 - Other moths and butterflies
 - The nectar in flowers feeds many insects, including bees, beetles, butterflies, fly and wasp species, and hummingbirds.



[Migratory monarch butterfly now Endangered - IUCN Red List - Press release | IUCN](#)

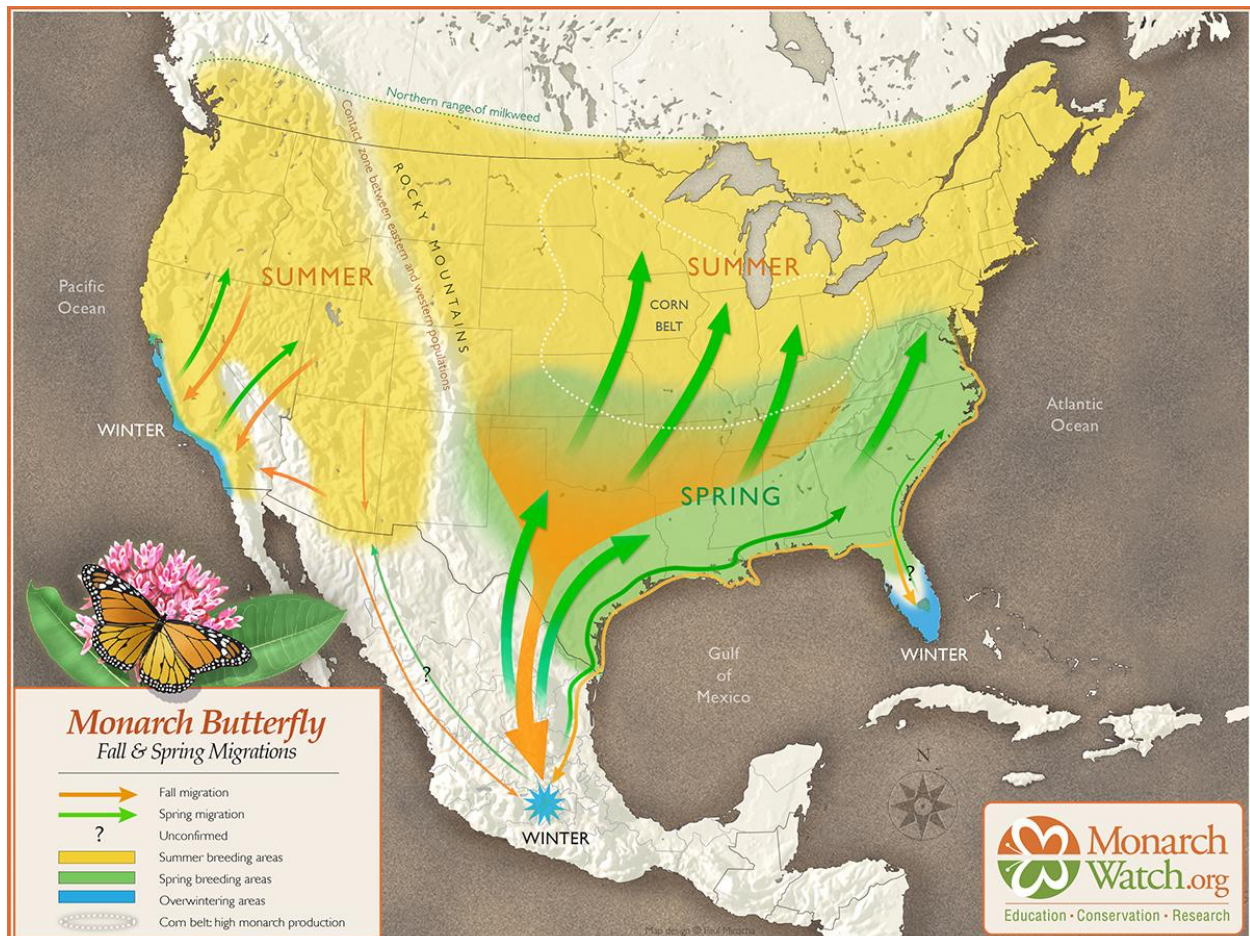
Europe has put it on the IUCN Red List.

The United States government is considering doing the same.

[What the Listing of the Monarch Butterfly as Endangered Means • The National Wildlife Federation Blog \(nwf.org\)](#)

We have established that the Monarch lifecycle solely depends upon access to pesticide-free milkweed.

The Eastern Monarch Migratory Path



The Monarch butterfly, one of the few migratory species in Michigan, begins its remarkable life journey in Central Mexico, setting out northward in March towards the Southern United States. Upon reaching their destination, the females lay their eggs and then die.



The next generation of Monarchs emerges from these eggs and continues the journey. This new generation flies to the Central United States, often called the Corn Belt, where they also lay eggs and complete their life cycle before perishing.

A second generation flies north to the northern states, laying eggs and perishing.

The third and final generations, however, are unique. They are born right here in Michigan and are often dubbed the "Superbutterfly," and every fall, according to the U.S. Forest Service, some travel as far as 3,000 miles to reach the mountainous Oyamel fir forest, which has a moist, cool climate that keeps the butterflies from drying out or freezing. The distance covered by monarchs during migration distinguishes them from any other butterfly species.

This extraordinary migration phenomenon, spanning multiple generations and thousands of miles, remains a scientific mystery. The annual migration of monarch butterflies from the northern U.S. to Mexico and back has been called ["one of the most spectacular natural phenomena in the world"](#) by scientist Lincoln Brower, one of the world's top experts on the species.

Scientists measure the hectares or acreage these butterflies inhabit yearly to monitor the Monarch population and its decline. That is why they can watch the population more accurately.

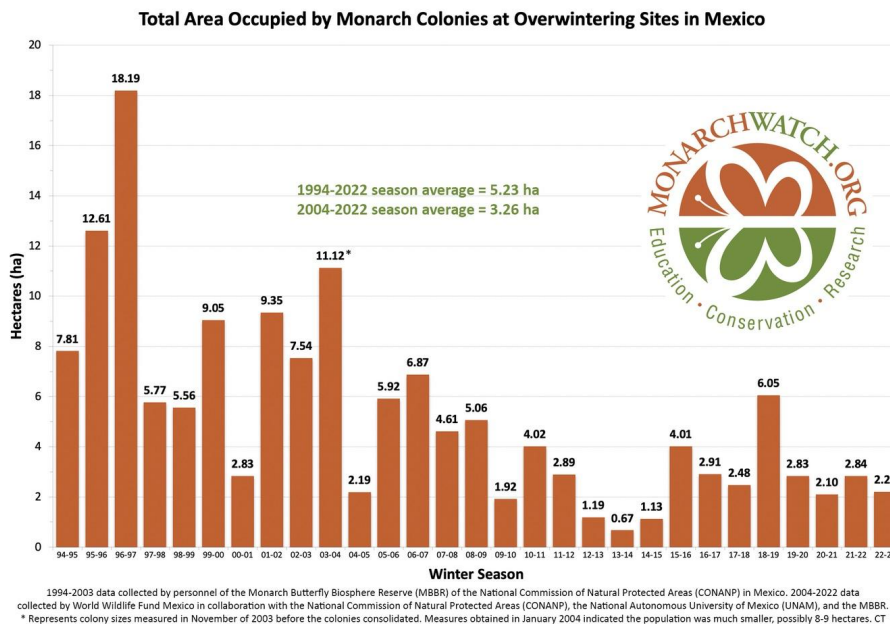


Figure 1. Total Area Occupied by Monarch Colonies at Overwintering Sites in Mexico.



Summary of Milkweed FACTS (Excerpted from Xerces Society "[Milkweed FAQs](#)")

- **Milkweeds are the only host plants for monarch butterfly caterpillars** (female monarchs lay their eggs on milkweeds), and their flowers provide nectar for bees, butterflies, and other beneficial insects.
- By planting milkweed, you can provide monarchs with habitat and attract and support pollinators. The Xerces Society recommends only planting milkweed species that are locally native and for which regionally sourced seeds and plants are available.
- **12 Varieties native to Michigan:**
Source: <http://bonap.net/NAPA/TaxonMaps/Genus/County/Asclepias>

Asclepius (A.) amplexicaulis, A. exaltata, A. incarnata, A. longifolia, A. ovalifolia, A. purpurascens, A. speciosa, A. sullivantii, A. syriaca, A. tuberosa, A. verticillate, A. viridiflora
- If you keep milkweed on the noxious weed list, that represents 12 varieties of native plants, which is a considerable loss.
- **Milkweeds are a diverse group of native wildflowers.** Some milkweed species may spread outside their planted area, but hand-pulling can remove unwanted plants. Milkweeds are unlikely to present an ongoing, unmanageable weed problem.

The comprehensive bill in question proposes the inclusion of additional plant species in the noxious weed list. I strongly advocate against adding any native plants to this list, primarily due to the far-reaching consequences and unintended impacts it may entail. Each native plant in Michigan plays a crucial role within the state's ecosystem, serving a unique purpose. Placing them on the noxious weed list could inadvertently promote their eradication, which should be avoided at all costs.

I specifically recommend excluding two native plants from this list:

1. **Poison Ivy:**
 - a. While it can cause rashes in some individuals, it is not fatal.
 - b. The poison ivy berries serve a vital function as a significant food source for birds during the winter when their nutritional needs are most critical.
 - c. It will be impossible to eradicate because the birds distribute the seeds. People can remove them from the areas they don't want, but I don't see the need to add them to the noxious weed list.



2. **Poison Sumac:**

- a. This plant contains urushiol, an oil that causes allergic rashes upon skin contact but is not fatal.
- b. It predominantly thrives in bogs, swamps, and similar wet environments, posing minimal concerns elsewhere.
- c. Poison sumac is not toxic to birds or other animals and is a valuable food source during food scarcity, especially in winter.

To foster healthy ecosystems, we must actively encourage the growth of native plants rather than stigmatizing them. Including a plant on the noxious weed list could restrict its presence even in natural areas. That is how the milkweed got on the list and is now being recommended to be taken off.

Therefore, I urge you to vote YES for HIB 4857 to ensure milkweed remains exempt from identification as a noxious weed in Michigan.

Furthermore, I implore you to refrain from adding Poison Ivy or Poison Sumac to the list, as their contributions to the state's biodiversity and ecosystem health are invaluable.

Sources

International Union for Conservation of Nature. "Migratory monarch butterfly now Endangered— IUCN Red List," Press release: 21 July 2022, (Accessed 9/27/23). <https://www.iucn.org/press-release/202207/migratory-monarch-butterfly-now-endangered-iucn-red-list>

Lauren J. Young. "The monarch butterfly is scientifically endangered. So why isn't it legally protected yet?" in *Popular Science*: 08/08/22, (Accessed 9/27/23). <https://www.popsci.com/environment/monarch-butterflies-endangered/>

MonarchWatch.org. "Monarch Populations Status," in *Monarch Watch Blog*, March 21, 2023, (Accessed 9/27/23). <https://monarchwatch.org/blog/2023/03/21/monarch-population-status-50/>

WWF. "Troubling news for monarch butterfly populations: Presence of monarchs in their wintering habitat drops 22% in one year," World Wildlife Federation: March 21, 2023, (Accessed 9/27/23). <https://www.worldwildlife.org/stories/troubling-news-for-monarch-butterfly-populations>

Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation. "Milkweed FAQs" on Xerces Society Webpage, 2006-2023, (Accessed 9/27/23). <https://www.xerces.org/milkweed-faq>

Not on Federal or Michigan list

[weedlist.pdf \(usda.gov\)](#)

[Michigan Prohibited and Restricted Weeds](#)