Connecticut's Northeast Quiet Corner Launches Regional Pollinator Pathway Collaboration

By Jean de Smet and Virginia D. Walton

Resident volunteers of seven contiguous towns in the Northeast "Quiet" Corner of Connecticut are collaborating to educate fellow citizens, share information and develop projects to establish regional networks of land that will become part of the Northeast Pollinator Pathway.

These efforts support Pollinator Pathway's mission to establish "pollinator-friendly habitat and food sources for bees, butterflies, hummingbirds and other pollinating insects and wildlife along a series of continuous corridors." The regional group recently purchased thousands of ecotypic wildflower seeds, which UCONN's Spring Valley Student Farm is sprouting, for regional distribution.

Each municipality has also undertaken their own efforts to promote and support pollinator-friendly practices. Members of the Garden Club of Windham established pollinator plantings along the East Coast Greenway and added pollinating plants to existing gardens, Ashford Garden Club established a

Willimantic Whitewater Park pollinator planting, before and after.

pollinator garden in front of its town library, Windham and Mansfield passed Pollinator Resolutions, Woodstock developed a resident pledge system to map pollinator-friendly practices in town, and Chaplin planned a Bicentennial Arboretum with native trees.

These organizations have been joined by representatives from Joshua's Trust (a land trust operating in the northeast corner.) Joshua's Trust planted wildflowers in 5 locations last spring, with an eye towards planting native shrubs in the future due to the dense tree coverage on many of their sites. They are giving out the 6" Pollinator Pathway signs.

Now local towns are also sharing information and ideas with one another. **"By collaborating among our communities, we believe we can make a bigger impact through our efforts**," says Jean de Smet, member of the Garden Club of Windham's Wildlife Habitat subcommittee. "**Since we are contiguous, our pathways can truly connect to support wildlife and beneficial insects."**

Collaborative efforts between Pollinator Pathway volunteers in Mansfield, Windham and Chaplin have already sponsored community education projects while engaging schools, scout troops, college students, and adults. Members of the E.O. Smith High School Leo Club and the Garden Club of Windham cleared invasive plants and added educational signage to identify which species feed on which plants along the East Coast Greenway.

Students and faculty from Eastern Connecticut State University ECSU) in Windham participated in the tri-town discussions on increasing pollinator habitat and hundreds of students volunteered with the Windham Garden Club projects to dig holes, plant trees and seedlings, and cut back invasives.

In the wider communities, seeds and pollinator brochures have been distributed, virtual webinars on pollinators have been sponsored, and in Windham, the public can learn about pollinator pathways at the annual VeggieStock, where plants and seeds are given away for free.

Collaboration among towns in the region makes it possible to share information about upcoming pollinator events and exchange ideas about everything from mapping regional pollinator pathways to engaging more citizens in pollinator-friendly practices and supporting regional sustainability efforts.

Because pollinators do not recognize town borders, other towns in Connecticut's Quiet Northeast Corner are welcome to join us in these collaborative efforts. "We invite resident participation in the regional pollinator pathway," says Virginia Walton, Mansfield Recycling Coordinator and staff member of the Mansfield Sustainability Committee, "by contacting me at 860-429-3333 or send an email to waltonvd@mansfieldct.org. Our efforts are not just homeowner or single-town based, but instead reflect a regional commitment to creating the contiguous corridors that pollinators need in order to survive and thrive."