

Restoring Native Prairie to Increase Pollinator Habitat

Project Overview – November 4, 2011

Project Lead: Many Rivers Chapter of The Prairie Enthusiasts, a non-profit 501(c)3 organization, with coordinating support from Conservation Marketplace of Minnesota (CMM).

Project Goal: To restore 8.5-acres of prairie with a highly diverse native wildflower and grass seed mix to increase quality habitat and forage for local **pollinators**.

Why Pollinators? Bees, butterflies and other animals pollinate more than two-thirds of the world's crop species. The Xerces Society reports that over one-third of managed honey bee colonies have died in the past three years and some native bumblebee species are on the brink of extinction. The cause may be a combination of pesticides, parasites, viruses and/or climate change. Providing high quality habitat is a straightforward way to attract and support native pollinator populations while also benefitting managed honey bees. Highly diverse native plantings with blooming wildflowers during the entire growing season and insecticide free buffers are vital to enhance pollinator habitat.

Background: Conservation professionals from CMM, a project of the Minnesota River Board, have been working with local partners, such as the Many Rivers Chapter of The Prairie Enthusiasts, to identify and partner with landowners willing to establish and maintain new high quality pollinator habitat on their land. CMM identifies priority, shovel-ready projects and then networks with corporations or foundations who are interested in voluntarily sponsoring the project (or its ecological outcomes). Guidance from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Xerces Society is used to develop native habitat for pollinators. The sites must be at least a half-acre in size and maintained for a minimum of five years. Members of CMM have recently worked with representatives from General Mills/Green Giant who will be establishing two pollinator habitat sites in Minnesota by the end of 2012 and will conduct pollinator research at each site in collaboration with the University of Minnesota and local bee keepers.

Proposed Project Details & Timeline: Jim and Kathryn Vonderharrs' property has been identified as an optimal site to establish habitat for pollinators. The Vonderharrs maintain two bee hives on their rural property, located on a bluff above the Minnesota River Valley along the northern border of Blue Earth County (see attached location map). The site was sprayed and burned twice to prepare for the native seeding. A fall dormant seeding was completed by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) on November 2, 2011. Maintenance, such as spot spraying and a prescribed burn, will be needed in the first few years to establish the native prairie. Once established, local ecotype seed will be collected to use in future restoration projects.

Contributors to the project (Unimin, MN DNR and Many Rivers Chapter of The Prairie Enthusiasts) will be recognized in a brief documentary to be produced by two film production interns from Minnesota State University, Mankato in 2012. The mini-documentary is being created as part of a larger effort to explain and promote CMM. In addition, Unimin's contributions will be listed in The Prairie Enthusiasts' newsletter (The Prairie Promoter) and the project story and group photograph will be distributed to the local press.

Proposal: Many Rivers Chapter of The Prairie Enthusiasts and Conservation Marketplace of Minnesota will deliver a project package of 8.5-acres of high quality pollinator habitat by restoring the Vonderharrs' native prairie for a cost of \$5,399.98. Contributions from Unimin will result in positive press and recognition in the documentary, newsletter, website and any general informational materials to be produced.