



JEFF SMITH

WISCONSIN STATE SENATOR – 31ST DISTRICT



Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 357
Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy
January 24, 2024

Chair Cowles and members of the committee, thank you for agreeing to hear this bill, and for giving me the opportunity to speak on its behalf.

The state of Wisconsin is currently one of 19 states that do not have laws on the books to protect pollinators and pollinator health, or even promote the planting of native species.

Senate Bill 357 requires state agencies and other state governmental entities to give preference, where appropriate, to using native prairie and forage plants to benefit native bees, butterflies, and other pollinators.

Gardens that utilize native plants are the most beneficial to pollinators because native pollinators are already adapted to the colors, shapes, and blooming cycles of native plants, compared to different plant species that are not native to our state and this region of the country. Furthermore, these native plants can obviously handle our climate and our four seasons.

This practice would encourage our native pollinators and those that travel through to have the best opportunity to pollinate throughout our state. Wisconsin has over 400 local pollinators and as our state changes from development and changes to our climate, small changes like this will help our critical inspect pollinator populations for years to come.

This practice would benefit the health and growth of our local pollinators as well as the sustainability of our state lands and I'm happy to answer any questions regarding this bill.

Thank you.

Lee STATE REPRESENTATIVE
SNODGRASS

To: Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy
From: Representative Lee Snodgrass
Re: Testimony on Senate Bill 357
Date: January 24, 2024

Dear Chairman Cowles and Members of the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy,

I'm pleased to submit testimony today in favor of SB357 which requires state agencies to give preference (when possible) to native prairie and forage plants in cases where state-directed planting occurs. Why should we care about what plants the state of Wisconsin plants at our facilities, roadways, and parks? Simply put, it's better for Wisconsin's native wildlife - especially pollinators. Wisconsin is home to the federally endangered rusty patched bumble bee and any steps we can take to cultivate habitats that support the rusty patched bumble bee and other native pollinators is smart for farmers, growers, and all of us who enjoy the biodiversity of Wisconsin landscapes.

Native plants are hardy, drought-resistant, and easy to grow. Typically they require less or no fertilizer, they help prevent soil erosion and reduce runoff pollution. Further, they provide suitable food and shelter for Wisconsin native wildlife including our important pollinator species. These plants are best suited for Wisconsin's climate and growing conditions.

Pollinators native to Wisconsin are adapted to the colors, shapes, and blooming cycles of native prairie and forage plants. We have an opportunity to make it easier for our over 400 local pollinators to find and locate plants that have matched the natural landscape of our state for centuries and are specifically adapted to thrive and provide food and shelter for native pollinators. The importance of a healthy pollinator population to Wisconsin cannot be overstated. We have seen a rapid decline in pollinator health over the past decade and taking small steps like passing this bill, can make a big difference for Wisconsin farmers and others who enjoy pollinator-dependent produce like apples and cranberries.

This bill provides guidance to state agencies to ensure preference is given to plantings which can increase the health and presence of native pollinators. Doing so would



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Lee STATE REPRESENTATIVE
SNODGRASS

benefit the growth of our local pollinators as well as the health and vibrancy of our state lands. This environmentally conscious act will continue to make Wisconsin the bee's knees for our many pollinators who require or prefer these familiar plants, flowers, and greenery.

Thank you for your consideration and your interest in cultivating healthy pollinator habitats that benefit Wisconsin's landscapes, native species, and individuals whose livelihood depends on pollinator health.

Sincerely,



Representative Lee Snodgrass



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Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy

2023 Senate Bill 357

Native Prairie and Forage Plants

January 24, 2024

Good morning, Chair Cowles and members of the Committee. My name is Owen Boyle, and I'm the Species Management Section Manager for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources' Bureau of Natural Heritage Conservation. Thank you for the opportunity to testify, for informational purposes, on Senate Bill 357, related to using native prairie and forage plants.

The Bureau of Natural Heritage Conservation is responsible for conserving Wisconsin's non-game animals, rare plants and their habitats, including both state and federally protected species. We encourage the use of native plants whenever possible, and we offer several tools on the department website to help identify plants that support pollinators, birds and other native Wisconsin wildlife. We manage many of Wisconsin's best remaining natural areas, along with many partners around the state.

Lack of habitat is one of the biggest problems facing Wisconsin's pollinators since many of them require specific plant species to survive and reproduce. Therefore, planting a variety of native plants can, in turn, help support a variety of wildlife.

That said, it is important to note these plantings require an investment in both time and money, and there can be a longer-term cost to maintaining these areas. Programs must prioritize the best use of limited funds. In our case, we must focus limited staff hours to the most important areas and where we can make the biggest difference.

In some areas, such as parks, areas of turf grass may be important for recreational uses. In rare cases, we even rely on non-native species to achieve specific objectives. For example, we sometimes plant annual rye in new restorations to temporarily stabilize the soil while we get native species established.

Finally, there is a wide range of state-managed vegetation beyond DNR lands. These range from the landscaping around office buildings, to correctional facilities, to DOT state rights-of-way, and we cannot speak for the other state agencies regarding how this bill might impact their work. Since pollinator habitat requires ongoing maintenance to be viable in future years, these will be important considerations. We assume the decision regarding whether it would be appropriate to plant native prairie and forage plants in an area would be left up to each agency.

In closing, we appreciate the Legislature's recognition of the importance of native plants to Wisconsin's wildlife. Planting native species is one conservation action that can have major positive benefits. On behalf of the Department of Natural Resources, we thank you for your time today, and I would be happy to answer any questions.

To: Sen. Senators Cowles (Chair), Wimberger (Vice-Chair), Tomczyk, Wirch, Agard and other members of the Natural Resource and Energy Committee
From: Prof. Claudio Gratton, University of Wisconsin - Madison, Department of Entomology
Re: Senate Bill 357: Native prairie and forage plants
Date: Jan. 24, 2024

Chairman Cowles and members of the Natural Resources and Energy Committee,

I would like to start by thanking you for the opportunity to offer my support for Senate Bill 357 relating to the preferential use of native plants and pollinator forage plants by state agencies.

I have been working on pollinator conservation in Wisconsin for over 15 years, and in 2016 I was fortunate to have been part of the steering committee that helped create the State of Wisconsin Pollinator Protection Plan.

Although it has been over 8 years since that plan, the topic of pollinator conservation is still a timely one since the situation is not improving. Insect pollinators benefit the people of Wisconsin in many ways. In a practical sense, Wisconsin agriculture has a thriving fruit sector – think apples, cranberries, and berries, vegetables – cucumber and pumpkins as examples – and honey and crop pollination industries that are all dependent in part on the availability of both managed bees like honey bees and wild bees. Wisconsin is also home to over 500 species of native bees, many of which are pollinators of our crops, but others which we are just starting to learn what their contributions are to our well-being.

A clear pattern emerging from research on insect pollinators, and bees in particular, including research we have done here in Wisconsin, is that the **loss of high quality habitat** is one of the key reasons for the decline of many bee species in our landscapes. And, a key aspect of high quality habitat is the availability of flowers, in particular the native flowers that are adapted to our climates here that bees use to feed to their young and grow their populations. Much of our landscape is low in these key flowering resources.

This bill makes the simple and common-sense recommendation that when the option exists, that state agencies that have the responsibility of land management, native plants and flowers that are known to be good as bee forage, should be used in the management of those habitats. Although the language of the bill is modest to start with, it does leave room for interpretation of when such a preferential use of native plants is “appropriate”, making it possible for other competing interests, such as costs or availability of seeds, to prevent even this small step from occurring. Given the urgency of the need to support our pollinators, I hope that we can somehow ensure that the spirit of law - to increase native plants in our landscapes - is fulfilled.

I am hopeful that this is the first of many more common-sense steps that we can take toward supporting our insect pollinators. I am particularly impressed by the number of co-sponsors of

the bill, which shows how relevant this topic is to a wide range of communities in Wisconsin. These initial steps in the stewardship of our natural resources will pay dividends by providing high quality produce that support our local farming communities, but also provide inspiration to the people of Wisconsin who see our leaders making an investment in the future.

Sincerely,



Dr. Claudio Gratton
Vilas Distinguished Achievement and Sorenson Professor
Department of Entomology
University of Wisconsin - Madison