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**\$245,176 in Federal Funds Awarded for Habitat Connectivity Project in Partnership with Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources**

Thanks to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Competitive State Wildlife Grant Program, McHenry County's habitat will improve to support the state and nation's vulnerable and declining wildlife.

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and McHenry County Conservation Foundation, the philanthropic partner of McHenry County Conservation District, were awarded \$245,176 in federal funds for a partnership project to improve habitat connectivity in Southeast Wisconsin and Northeast Illinois.

By partnering across the WI-IL border to implement this work on public lands, restoration work will connect habitat areas on nearly 235 acres for pollinators, birds and herptiles associated with the wetland, prairie, savanna and oak woodland continuum. Specifically, these species include the federally endangered Rusty-patched bumble bee, Monarch butterfly, Henslow's sparrow, Blanding's turtle and other Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) identified in the IL and WI state Wildlife Action Plans.

The project area is part of the Southern Kettle Moraine Conservation Opportunity Area in southeastern Wisconsin and Glacial Park within the Lake-McHenry Wetland Complex COA in Illinois. In Illinois, the project area links the Lake-McHenry wetland complex, the Nippersink Creek corridor, Glacial Park Conservation Area in Richmond, and the Hackmatack National Wildlife Refuge cores and corridors. It is also included in McHenry County's Green Infrastructure network plans.

Both state's project areas are embedded within larger areas of conservation opportunity. Focusing management at locations that connect habitat is an important conservation strategy for birds, herptiles and pollinators, particularly where conservation opportunities are scarce and require sustained care. During the 2.5-year project, restoration work will involve invasive species control, brush and non-native tree removal, prescribed burns, extensive planting of native species in mesic prairie, fen wetland, oak savanna and woodland habitats. Surveys will also be conducted on the endangered and SGCN species to monitor the effectiveness of the restoration activities in improving the local populations.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service awarded more than \$7.7 million in grants for 18 projects across 13 states and territories. The projects were selected from a competitive slate of proposals to address priorities identified in Wildlife Action Plans. The announcement comes as the Endangered Species Act (ESA) turns 50 years old in 2023. Throughout the year, the Department of the Interior is celebrating the ESA's importance in preventing imperiled species' extinction, promoting the recovery of wildlife and conserving the habitats upon which they depend.

*McHenry County Conservation District currently owns and protects over 25,700 acres of open space which provides wildlife habitat preservation, educational opportunities and recreational amenities for the citizens of McHenry County to enjoy.*

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