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## Feature Story

### NRCS of Mississippi Creates Pollinator Habitats in a Jackson City Park

By: Candace Chambers, Public Affairs Student Intern



June is National Pollinator Month and the United States Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is making efforts in sustaining pollinator habitats across the country.

Due to a decrease in population, United States Secretary of Agriculture, Tom Vilsack, requested the planting of thousands of miles of pollinator habitats across the nation. Last year, President Obama also launched a National Pollinator Initiative to assist in pollinator conservation and the protection of food security.

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NRCS of Mississippi, the United States Forest Service in Mississippi, and Keep Jackson Beautiful have responded to the task by participating in an ongoing collaborative initiative in planting gardens of milkweed at Battlefield Park in Jackson, Mississippi. Milkweed serves as a habitat for the monarch butterfly.

The monarch butterfly has experienced an 80% population decline in the last 20 years and conservationists around the state are partnering to combat this staggering dilemma.

“This project originated as an agreement between the United States Forest Service (USFS) in Mississippi and the NRCS-Jamie L. Whitten Plant Materials Center (PMC) in Coffeeville. Plant materials staff provided expertise in three separate areas for the agreement,” said Alayna Jacobs, manager of the NRCS James Whitten Plant Center in Coffeeville, Mississippi.

Specifically, PMC staff provided expertise for growing and establishing butterfly and swamp milkweed



for butterfly and pollinator habitat at elementary schools, USFS lands, and other areas. An estimated 3,000 milkweed plugs have been provided for planting in urban gardens, schools, and on USFS lands.

“We are thankful for the opportunity to partner with the United States Forest Service in creating pollinator habitats, such as the butterfly gardens, across the state. These efforts prove the power of partnership between those who share the vision of conservation in the state of Mississippi,” said Kurt Readus, State Conservationist for Mississippi.

The milkweeds were initially harvested at the PMC, then transferred into the gardens at Battlefield Park. Monarch butterflies use milkweed as a major habitat during the cycle of migration from North to South America.

“It is really important that we have the habitat necessary to support the monarch butterfly, which in turn, provides the pollination for our crops, where we get our food and fiber for this country and for the world,” said Delmer Stamps, NRCS State Resource Conservationist for Mississippi.

Conservationists hope to spread the message of the importance of conserving habitats for pollinators by educating the youth. Students from across the city and surrounding areas helped in the project of planting the milkweeds.

Gretta Boley, Forest Supervisor for the National Forests Service of Mississippi, recognizes the impact of the involvement of youth in conserving natural resources.

“We wanted to take advantage of being a part of the city of Jackson and working with the children. We want to get them connected to the land and to the environment,” said Boley.

Pollinators are essential to the food supply as many food crops depend on animal pollination to reproduce. Packages of seeds are being distributed to the public in hopes to extend conservation efforts.

“Our local Soil and Water Conservation Districts are working with school districts and municipalities like the City of Jackson in providing packages of seeds in conjunction with the Department of Interior and Burpee Seed Company to establish such habitat,” said Stamps.

With hopes of creating lasting habitats for the monarch butterfly, the butterfly gardens at Battlefield Park are in full effect in the conservation process. Not only will they be of assistance to the butterflies, but they will bring source of attraction for the public.

