

Planned Testimony

Senate Ways and Means Committee Proponents Hearing Senate Bill 36

Presented By Douglas Erwin

2781 Eris Rd

Urbana, Ohio 43078

Thank you. Chairman Eklund, Vice Chairman Terhar, Ranking Member Williams, and members of the committee.

My name is Douglas Erwin, from Urbana in Champaign County.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you again about the effect of current Real Estate Tax rules on landowners who have contracts with State and Federal Agencies for conservation programs. Since I was here last year the situation continues to worsen.

I am here today representing farmers and landowners who have made and contemplate making future commitments to Conservation programs, making long term commitments to protect our environment.

I own land enrolled in the Wetlands Reserve program and I am the manager of a trust that holds agriculture lands and properties in four Ohio Counties. I also advise Landowners in 2 other counties that have agriculture and conservation operations. I have also discussed this issue with other conservation minded landowners. The properties I manage include producing agriculture land, land enrolled in several conservation programs, and some land that is idle not farmed, or enrolled in any type of federal or state program. I manage approximately 3,800 acres of which about 2,200 acres are enrolled in USDA Farm Bill conservation programs.

Our farming operation grows corn, beans, wheat, hay, livestock, and includes woodlands for timber production and wildlife. Another part of our business model includes conservation programs and practices, including the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP), Wetlands Reserve Easement (WRE) and approximately 500 acres enrolled in various Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) practices,

As you are aware, farmers and landowner's contract with state and federal agencies to enroll land into long term conservation programs that reduce soil erosion, improve water quality and provide wildlife habitat. A recent endeavor being planting over 300 acres of Pollinator habitat that will benefit Bees, Butterfly's, Birds and Wildlife. You may be aware that the iconic Monarch Butterfly is being considered for listing as a threatened or endangered species, The Honey Bee is one of agriculture's most important and hardest workers pollinating many of our crops and foods.

These Conservation practices must be in place for 10, 15, 30 years or in some cases perpetuity. These agreements involve commitments by the landowner and or successors to maintain and hold the land as agreed for the term of the contract. Agreements involve up front or annual payments which are fixed for the term of the contract upon closing of the contract.

Once the contract is closed the Landowner controls the land with contractual restrictions, for example, no permanent structures, no cropping, no pasturing, essentially no income producing activity.

In the case of CRP, there are annual rental payments, but those historically have been lower than cash rent for crop production and are fixed for the term of the contract. As part of the contract, lands must be maintained in the conservation cover outlined in the Agency's conservation plan.

Maintenance activities like mowing and spraying are required to maintain the conservation cover and of course the Real Estate Taxes must be paid.

Currently it seems that these conservation lands are taxed under the CAUV system as if they are producing income. This has led to Tax bill increases of 200, 300, 600% or more over the past 5 years based on my operation. One parcel that the Trust that I help manage has determined it must sell, to maintain the financial integrity of the Trust has seen a 647% increase from 2012 to 2016 with zero income.

Please see attachments to my written testimony as examples.

At these rates the commitment to these conservation programs is in jeopardy. At a time when we need to have conservation practices on our landscape to reduce erosion, improve water quality and provide habitat for fragile resources s. a. bees, butterfly, and birds.

I'm concerned that farmers and landowners will have second thoughts of enrolling and or keeping their lands in these conservation practices unless a fair value is assessed.

We need a Fair, Equitable and Predictable plan for paying our land taxes.

All Ohioans benefit from these conservation programs through reducing sediment and nutrients in our rivers and lakes, improving water quality and providing necessary habitat for pollinators, birds and our state's abundant wildlife and natural resources. As the manager/owner of grasslands and woodlands I question why anyone would enroll in Conservation Programs with long term commitments, or maintain woodlands intact if the land will be taxed as if it were in crop production. Farmers and landowners should be incentivized or at least not penalized for participating in Conservation programs which protect all Ohioans from damages to the environment like we are seeing in Lake Erie, Lake St. Mary's and the many River systems of our great state. We have an opportunity through this legislation to change direction, if we don't we

will continue to have Natural Resource problems and I fear they will be exacerbated as these fragile lands taxed to such a high level, that the landowner would have no choice other than returning to production and or developing into housing or Malls. No question, Ohio can have a balance of Agriculture and Conservation, with clean rivers and lakes, abundant wildlife and fisheries. Let's come to a plan that allows that.

Thanks again, I along with the owners of lands committed to these programs urge your support of changes outlined in Senate Bill 36 to mitigate these issues of assessments on conservation lands.

I would like to leave you with one final thought. No one, no matter their income, wealth or wherewithal can deal with this rate of inflation and uncertainty in their cost of living?

I look forward to any questions that the committee may have.



United States Department of Agriculture

Office of Communications

1400 Independence Ave, SW
Washington, DC 20250-1300
(202) 720-4623
oc.news@usda.gov
www.usda.gov

News Release

Release No. 0114.16

Contact:
Office of Communications
press@oc.usda.gov
(202) 720-4623

USDA Releases Results of New Survey on Honey Bee Colony Health

Survey Developed as Part of National Pollinator Research Action Plan Gives New Insight into Losses of Managed Bee Colonies

WASHINGTON, May 12, 2016 – The U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Agriculture Statistics Service (NASS) released the results of its first ever Honey Bee Colony Loss survey today. The survey queried more than 20,000 honey beekeepers about the number of colonies, colonies lost, colonies added, and colonies affected by certain stressors and gleans state-level estimates on key honey bee health topics. The survey was developed as part of the "National Strategy to Promote the Health of Honey Bees and Other Pollinators" released last summer, and gleans state-level estimates on key pollinator health topics.

Results from the survey will provide statistically strong baseline information about honey bee losses and can help guide honey bee management decisions in the United States. NASS created the survey questions with input from beekeepers and researchers, and other stakeholders. The results will allow USDA and other federal departments and agencies to create a more unified and complementary approach to implementing the National Strategy, which was unveiled in May 2015.

"Pollinators are essential to the production of food, and in the United States, honey bees pollinate an estimated \$15 billion of crops each year, ranging from almonds to zucchinis," said Dr. Ann Bartuska, USDA Deputy Under Secretary for Research, Education and Economics. "This new data will add to USDA's robust scientific body of knowledge on the inventory, movement and death loss of honeybees in the United States."

For this report, NASS surveyed 3,300 beekeeping operations with five or more colonies on a quarterly basis, following their operations throughout the year. In addition, NASS surveyed a sample of 20,000 beekeepers who have less than five colonies annually. Data collected covers the state in which colonies are located, movement of colonies between states, newly added or replaced colonies, number of colonies lost, colonies renovated, and presence of colony stressors and specific signs of illness. The responses allow USDA for the first time to differentiate patterns between small-scale and commercial beekeepers, analyze data on a state-by-state basis, and compare more specific quarterly losses, additions and renovations for larger scale beekeepers.

According to the survey released today, there were 2.59 million or 8% fewer honey bee colonies on January 1, 2016 than the 2.82 million present a year earlier on January 1, 2015 for operations with five or more colonies. New quarterly colony data allow new levels of analysis. For example, there was an 18% loss of colonies in the January-March quarter in 2015 and a 17% loss in the same quarter in 2016. Honey beekeepers with five or more colonies reported Varroa mites as the leading stressor affecting colonies. They also reported more colonies with symptoms of Colony Collapse Disorder lost in the first quarter of 2016 with 113,930 than the 92,250 lost in the same quarter in 2015.

This research complements other information USDA and partners have been collecting for years. For example, in March NASS released its annual report on [honey production](#) and prices for 2015. This report, which is used by USDA, producers, economists, agribusiness and others, found that U.S. honey production in 2015 from producers with five or more colonies totaled 157 million pounds, down 12 percent from 2014.

There were 2.66 million colonies from which honey was harvested in 2015, down 3 percent from 2014. Honey prices were 209.0 cents per pound, down 4 percent from a record high of 217.3 cents per pound in 2014.

In addition, for the past 10 years USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture has helped fund collaboration between the Bee Informed Partnership and the Apiary Inspectors of America to produce an annual survey that asks both commercial and small-scale beekeepers to track the health and survival rates of their honey bee colonies. This year's survey results, which were released May 10, were gleaned from the responses of 5,700 beekeepers from 48 states who are responsible for about 15 percent of the nation's managed honey bee colonies.

The data being released by NASS today adds to these two efforts by providing a baseline federal statistical resource to track change of reported numbers and death loss in colonies managed by small hobbyists up to the largest commercial producers.

The National Strategy, developed under the leadership of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and USDA) set three overarching goals: 1) reduce honey bee colony losses to economically sustainable levels; 2) increase monarch butterfly numbers to protect the annual migration; and 3) restore or enhance millions of acres of land for pollinators through combined public and private action. The plan was accompanied by a science-based Pollinator Research Action Plan. In addition to the surveys mentioned above, a number of research activities within USDA's Research, Education and Economics mission area have been initiated since the action plan was released; for example:

- NIFA is currently seeking applications for a total of \$16.8 million in grant funding for research projects with an emphasis on pollinator health;

- The Agricultural Research Service (ARS) is organizing a national bee genebank as part of the agency's response to ongoing problems facing the country's beekeepers. The genebank, which will be located in Fort Collins, Colorado, will help preserve the genetic diversity of honey bees, especially for traits such as resistance to pests or diseases and pollination efficiency;

- ARS has launched a research project aimed at determining the effects of seasonal pollens on brood rearing, on bees' immune response to pathogen stress, and on whether geographic location influences such effects;

- ARS has launched a study to determine whether hyperspectral imaging can be used as a non-invasive method of monitoring bee colony health; and

- ARS has launched a project to determine colony survival, population size, cost and the return on investment of two overwintering strategies for controlling Varroa mites.

#

USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer. To file a complaint of discrimination, write: USDA, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, Office of Adjudication, 1400 Independence Ave., SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (866) 632-9992 (Toll-free Customer Service), (800) 877-8339 (Local or Federal relay), (866) 377-8642 (Relay voice users).

#

Eastern Monarch Population Numbers Drop 27%



News Categories

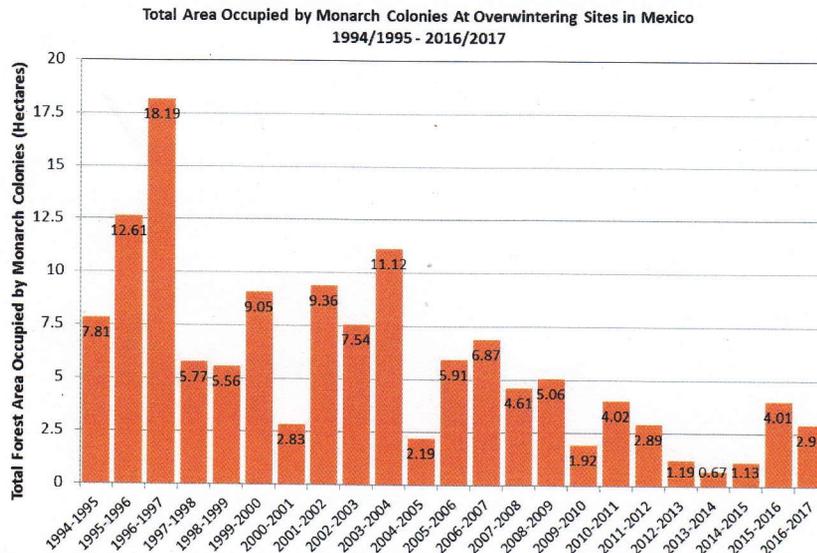
- Citizen Science
- Conservation Stories
- Migration
- MJV Partnership News
- Population Trends
- MonarchNet Newsletter
- Recent Research
- All News

Related Projects

Thursday, February 16, 2017 2:13pm | Population Trends

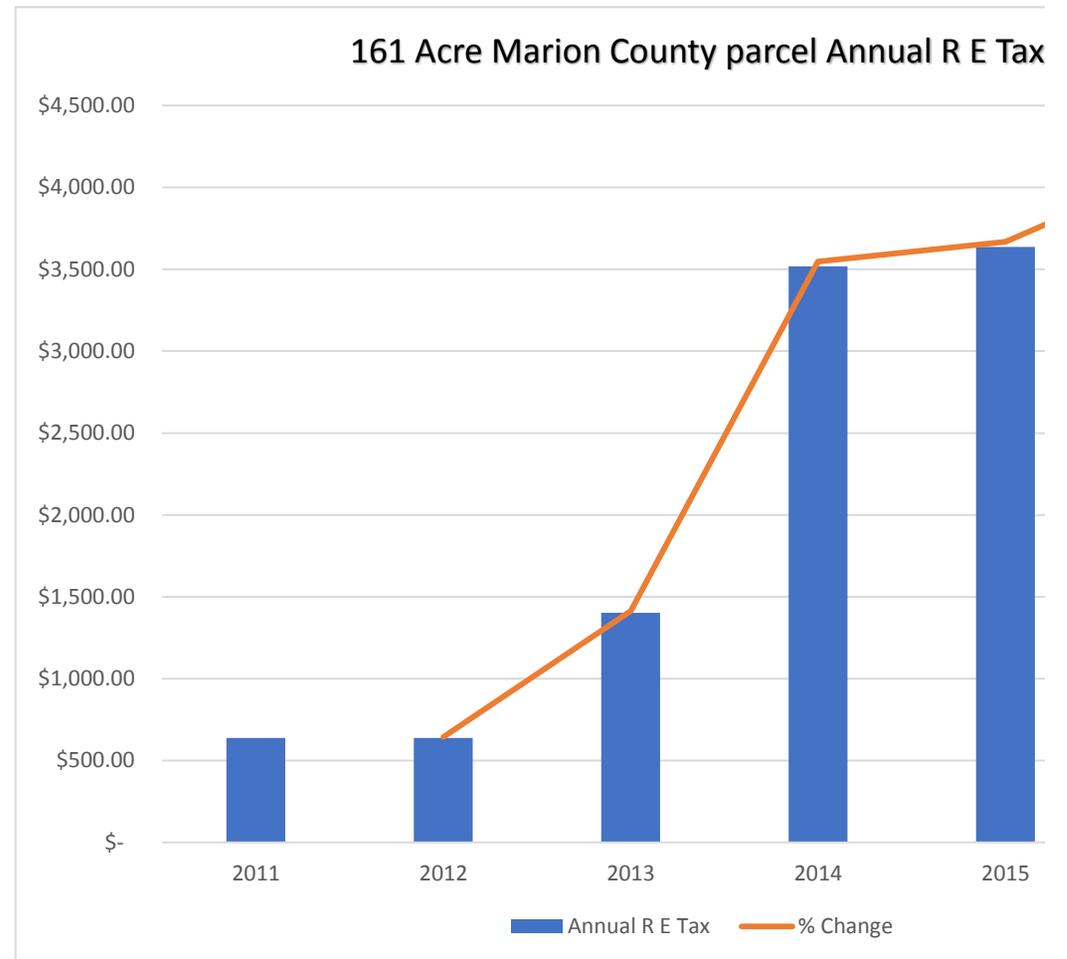
This year's measurement of the eastern monarch overwintering population showed a 27% decrease compared to last year, occupying 2.91 hectares of forest in Mexico's transvolcanic mountains during the winter of 2016-17. It is likely that an **extreme and unusual winter storm** contributed to this decrease. This March storm struck the overwintering colonies just as monarchs were beginning to depart on their journey north.

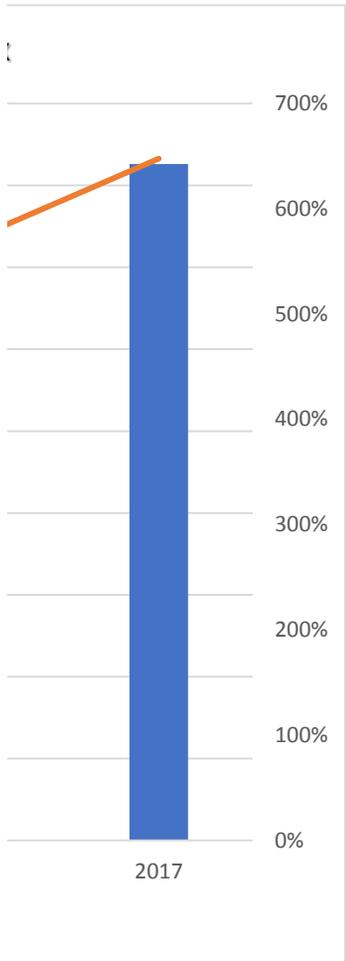
Events such as last year's 'St. Patrick's Day Storm' are a strong reminder that we must increase efforts to restore and maintain monarch breeding and migration habitat to support a rebounding population that is buffered against such threats.



Data from 1994-2003 were collected by personnel of the Monarch Butterfly Biosphere Reserve (MBBR) of the National Commission of Protected Natural Areas (CONANP) in Mexico. Data from 2004-2016 were collected by the WWF-Telcel Alliance, in coordination with the Directorate of the MBBR. 2000-01 population number as reported by Garcia-Serrano et al (The Monarch Butterfly: Biology and Conservation, 2004)

Year	Annual R E T	% Change
2011	\$ 637.62	
2012	\$ 637.60	100%
2013	\$ 1,402.76	220%
2014	\$ 3,517.68	552%
2015	\$ 3,637.38	570%
2017	\$ 4,130.72	648%





Year	CAUV Value	Percentage change
2007	\$89,850.00	
2008	\$89,850.00	100%
2009	\$89,850.00	100%
2010	\$198,750.00	221%
2011	\$198,750.00	221%
2012	\$198,750.00	221%
2013	\$628,230.00	699%
2014	\$628,230.00	699%
2015	\$938,200.00	1044%
2016	\$964,210.00	1073%

