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BEE AWARE: STATE POLLINATOR PROTECTION PLAN SEEKS TO IMPROVE DECLINING POLLINATOR POPULATION

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By: Garlan Joseph VanHook

Pollinators play a vital role in the United States' economy.^[i] Honeybee pollination adds \$15 billion in value to agricultural crops in the United States each year.^[ii] However, over the past two decades, there has been a steady decline in the population of pollinators.^[iii] Last year, the United States experienced a forty percent decline in bee population overall.^[iv] In the Commonwealth of Kentucky, a thirty percent drop was reported.^[v] The decline is attributed to increased pesticide use and a phenomenon referred to as "Colony Collapse Disorder" where worker bees abandon the queen bee.^[vi]

The population collapse has sparked national awareness and action.^[vii] Last June, President Obama issued an executive memorandum creating a task force for promoting the growth and health of honey bees and other pollinators.^[viii] Complying with the pollinator plan is voluntary, but each state is required to establish one.^[ix] Kentucky has a substantial interest in devising and enacting a plan quickly because of the large agriculture economy base.^[x] Florida promptly established a plan to quickly repopulate pollinators and protect existing colonies to assist with the growth of citrus.^[xi]

In Kentucky, the Department of Agriculture is devising a plan to improve honey bee health, stimulate population growth, and improve bee awareness in the community.^[xii] The proposed plan of action is four-fold.^[xiii]

First, "Best Management Practices" are encouraged with a focus on beekeepers and chemical applicators, but also includes information for the Commonwealth's citizens, landowners, and lawn mowers.^[xiv] Everyone can play an important role in the proposed pollinator plan.^[xv] Kentuckians should not feel obligated to become beekeepers or to locate colonies on their property, however, there are numerous ways for regular citizens to help improve the environment to protect bees.^[xvi] Planting flowers can provide bees with the nectar they need to survive and can improve the aesthetics of a property.^[xvii]

The second goal of the plan is to increase the pollinator habitat.^[xviii] This includes transforming 200,000 plus acres of state-owned right-of-way into pollinator protection zones.^[xix] Federal grants have been made available for the conversion of reclaimed surface mine sites into pollinator habitats.^[xx] The State Parks Program will also be involved with the pollinator plan.^[xxi] Currently, Big Bone Lick Park in northern Kentucky offers beekeeping programs for children and adults.^[xxii] A strong possibility for large-scale, statewide pollinator habitat creation would be to use the forty-nine Kentucky State Parks as colony hosts.^[xxiii]

The third and fourth goals of the pollinator plan are to improve the communication and outreach of the pollinator plan with the Commonwealth's citizens.^[xxiv] The top priority of this plan is to create a system for electronic communication between chemical applicators and beekeepers.^[xxv] Other general public information will be divulged by electronic means, as well as through localized means such as fairs, festivals, beekeepers associations, and through county extension agents.^[xxvi]

This plan is very encompassing as it stands. However, one aspect is missing from most of the national plans that Kentucky should adopt. In addition to the communication measures included in parts three and four of the plan, a hotline should be established that citizens can call in the case of bee swarms on their property. This plan might be similar to the Kentucky 811, "Call before you dig" program established to combat the damage of underground utility, gas, and electric lines.^[xxvii] A local beekeeper from the network of beekeeper associations could attempt to remove and relocate the swarm to an environment away from where it is causing a nuisance. As a quick fix many property owners use "hot shot" to kill the bees, but this only perpetuates the declining bee population issue. Beekeepers can safely relocate the bees where they can best provide the pollinating services that crops and plants require.



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"Everyone eats."^[xxviii] The existence of pollinators is a vital supporting factor in creating the food we eat,^[xxix] thus, pollinators should be extended the utmost protection. The Commonwealth of Kentucky is in a unique position to create a plan that other states will aspire to mimic. Because of the significant economic reliance on the issues that the pollinator plan seeks to improve, Kentucky's plan should set forth prospective strategies that establish a network within the community to rectify the well-being of bee and other pollinator populations.

[i] John P. Holdren, *Announcing New Steps to Promote Pollinator Health*, The White House (May 19, 2015, 9:00 AM), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2015/05/19/announcing-new-steps-promote-pollinator-health>.

[ii] *Id.*

[iii] *Id.*

[iv] *Id.*

[v] Erica Peterson, *New Pollinator Plan Aims To Cut Kentucky's Honeybee Losses*, WFPL (Feb. 19, 2016), <http://wfpl.org/new-pollinator-plan-aims-cut-kentuckys-honeybee-losses/>.

[vi] *Colony Collapse Disorder*, E envtl. Prot. Agency (Jan. 6, 2016), <http://www.epa.gov/pollinator-protection/colony-collapse-disorder>;
In 2010, my family started a small colony of bees in south central Kentucky in order to contribute to the revival of the bee population in our area. Our colony thrived for a few years as we added rescued hives from nuisance swarms that were reported to us from around the area. Unfortunately, like the general population of bees, we experienced significant losses in our colony population each year, which eventually led to a complete abandonment/extinction of the colony.

[vii] *See Holdren, supra* note i.

[viii] *Id.*

[ix] Peterson, *supra* note v.

[x] *Id.*

[xi] Jeanette Klopchin, *Florida Bee Protection*, Fla. Dept. of Agric. And Consumer Serv. 1, 7-8, <http://www.aspcro.org/meetings/minutes/2015/AUG24/pres-pollination-klopchin.pdf> (last visited Feb. 26, 2016).

[xii] Tammy Horn, *Kentucky Pollinator Plan*, Ky. Dept. of Agric. 1 (Feb. 10, 2016), http://www.kyagr.com/statevet/documents/OSV_Bee_KY-Pollinator-Pro-Plan-2016.pdf.

[xiii] *See id.* at 3-11.

[xiv] *Id.* at 3-8.

[xv] *See id.* at 6-7.

[xvi] *Id.*

[xvii] *Id.* at 6.

[xviii] *Id.* at 8.

[xix] *Id.*

[xx] *Id.*

[xxi] *Id.* at 9.

[xxii] *Id.*

[xxiii] Kentucky State Parks, <http://parks.ky.gov/> (last visited Feb. 26, 2016).

[xxiv] Horn, *supra* note xii, at 10-11.

[xxv] *Id.* at 10.

[xxvi] *Id.* at 10-11.

[xxvii] *See* Kentucky 811, <http://kentucky811.org/about-2/about-ky81> (last visited Feb. 27, 2016).

[xxviii] Peterson, *supra* note v.

[xxix] *Id.*

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