



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

# Press Release

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## Support for the monarch butterfly soars at the MWRD



*The MWRD Board of Commissioners presented a resolution to Iris Caldwell and Klaudia Kuklinska from the Chicago Energy Resources Center's Sustainable Landscapes program at the University of Illinois. The program coordinates the Illinois Monarch Project, which strives to establish a thriving local population of monarch butterflies.*



*The MWRD has converted several acres of conventional turf grass to native prairie landscaping (NPL) that reduces the long-term cost of grounds maintenance, collects stormwater, increases biodiversity and wildlife habitat and sequesters carbon. With the addition of native milkweed, the MWRD can attract more monarch butterflies.*

Native planting and green space availability have long been priorities for the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD) as it manages stormwater, and now too is the plight of the monarch butterfly.

The MWRD Board of Commissioners passed a resolution on Feb. 6 supporting the Illinois Monarch Project. The resolution was presented to Sustainable Landscapes Program Manager Iris Caldwell and Program Assistant Klaudia Kuklinska of the University of Illinois at Chicago's (UIC's) Energy Resources Center, who are helping coordinate the efforts of the Illinois Monarch Project. The collaborative movement unites agencies, organizations and individuals committed to helping monarch butterflies thrive throughout Illinois. The Illinois Monarch Project encourages these stakeholders to address conservation and engage public and private landowners across diverse urban and rural landscapes to protect the butterflies.

"We are honored to be recognized by the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District. It is wonderful to see MWRD's leadership and support of this important effort to benefit the monarch butterfly and other pollinators. We look forward to continuing our work together," said Caldwell. "The Energy Resources Center at the University of Illinois-Chicago has been at the center of working with diverse stakeholders

across the state over the last three years. This builds upon other work we do regionally and nationally to promote pollinator habitat on rights-of-way as well as other sustainability practices, including facility energy efficiency and renewable energy technologies. The university is proud to be a partner with MWRD on a number of these initiatives."

New studies suggest that the monarch butterfly population has rapidly declined due to climate change and the loss of milkweed resulting from development, poor land management practices, illegal logging and heavy reliance on pesticides and herbicides in the United States and Canada. While the butterflies have declined, so too has milkweed, the sole source of food for monarch caterpillars. According to the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR), five of the 23 milkweed species that are native to Illinois are also listed as endangered.

To support the Illinois Monarch Project, the MWRD plans to plant milkweed as part of its native prairie landscaping (NPL) and distribute free milkweed seed packets at community outreach events this year.

"The MWRD is a perfect fit to support the Illinois Monarch Project in our work combating flooding, encouraging native planting and opposing pesticides and herbicides (*continued*)

## Support for the monarch butterfly soars at the MWRD, *cont.*

that negatively impact our water resources and our butterflies,” said MWRD Commissioner Kimberly Du Buclet. “We have the land, the resilience, the expertise and experience to help the monarch butterfly and milkweed rebound across our region.”

Cook County is part of the monarch butterfly’s annual migration route from Mexico to Canada, providing a stopover or visit to native milkweed species. In 1975, Illinois designated the iconic monarch butterfly as the official state insect after the idea was suggested by third graders from Decatur. According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), monarch butterflies also serve as pollinators supporting natural ecosystems as well as for human food production, and pheasant, quail, waterfowl and many other species.

“We look forward to partnering with other local organizations, and we thank the Illinois Monarch Project for their leadership on this campaign,” said Commissioner Frank Avila.

The USFWS says there are ways the public can help by gardening organically and planting milkweed and nectar plants that are native to the area.

The goal of the Illinois Monarch Project is to add 150 million new stems of milkweed embedded in diverse nectar producing plants by 2038. To accomplish this goal, the Midwest



*The MWRD native prairie landscaping is home to plants that can be an attraction to monarch butterflies that face a battle of survival.*

Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies said participation from agriculture, education, natural lands, rights-of-way, and urban stakeholders will be necessary.

UIC officials are planning to roll out the Illinois Monarch Action Plan this spring while collaborating with the utility, transportation and agriculture sectors as well as urban, suburban, and rural landscapes to plant 150 million milkweed stems and create additional habitat for the monarch butterfly and other pollinators.

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### ***Recovering Resources, Transforming Water***

*Established in 1889, the MWRD ([www.mwr.org](http://www.mwr.org)) is an award winning, special purpose government agency responsible for wastewater treatment and stormwater management in Cook County, Illinois.*