

Southwest Region “Three-Peat” – Southwest Region Wins National Pollinator Challenge Again

For the third year in a row, the Southwest Region has won the Service's National Pollinator Challenge, capturing the highest scores for pollinator conservation activities nationwide. This was truly a cross-program effort in which employees from 17 National Wildlife Refuges; 4 Ecological Services Field Offices with 3 of their Partners programs; 1 Migratory Bird Field Office; and the Southwest Regional Office – represented by Refuges, Fisheries, Ecological Services, Migratory Birds, and the Wildlife Sport Fish Restoration Program worked together as “One Service/One Region.”

When all the scores were tallied, the Southwest Region led the pack with a total of 978 points! Corpus Christi Ecological Services and Partners Program tallied the most points (176), followed closely by the Southwest Arizona National Wildlife Refuge Complex (150 points), San Bernadino NWR [also Arizona] (106 points), and the Southwest Regional Office collectively (Refuges, Fisheries, ES, Migratory Birds, and WSFR) (114 points).

You can't imagine how proud of the Southwest Region I felt as I accepted the pollinator award from the Director on your behalf. This award demonstrates the dedicated efforts you put forth last year. I cannot tell you how proud and impressed I am to know that, between April and October 2013, you:

- Presented 55 educational events at schools, universities, nature centers, refuges, camps, Navajo Reservation, National Parks, community gardens, garden centers, conferences, festivals, private ranches, etc.;
- Conducted 18 inventory and monitoring projects involving bees, moths, nectar bats, butterflies, monarchs, hummingbirds, and all pollinators;
- Initiated 1 pilot National Conservation Training Center course “Building Urban Community Habitats for Youth,” hosted by the Southwest Regional Office. That training-involved garden site visits to learn design and final product presentation; field trips to other community gardens (including Valle del Oro NWR for garden planning); and presentations to staff by local experts;
- Produced 3 peer-reviewed scientific papers on southwestern pollinators including –
 - <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/23536593>
 - <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/icad.12049/abstract>
- Restored over 785 acres of pollinator habitat in 17 projects, most often by removing exotic plants, re-planting with native wildflowers to benefit pollinators on private lands, and restoring wetlands.

Special thanks go to Julie McIntyre, the Southwest Region's biggest advocate for pollinators, for her extraordinary efforts encouraging, coordinating and participating in many of these activities, and collecting and submitting the event data to Headquarters.

The annual Pollinator Challenge was initiated three years ago. That makes us 3 for 0 in this prestigious competition. I am very proud of our Southwest Region team! Thanks to everyone who worked so hard to help us earn this distinctive honor.

The 2014 Pollinator Challenge begins today (April 15) and runs through Sept 30, 2014. Let's bring this award home to the Southwest Region for a fourth year!