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H.R. 2381-Highways Bettering the Economy and Environment (BEE) Act

Highway right-of-ways (ROWs) managed by State Departments of Transportation (State DOTs) represent about 17 million acres of opportunity where significant economic and conservation/environmental benefits can be achieved through integrated vegetation management (IVM) practices that can significantly reduce mowing and maintenance costs for cash-strapped State DOTs. In addition, these plantings provide habitat and migratory corridors for pollinators, ground nesting birds and other small wildlife, especially bees and butterflies in critical need of healthy forage and nesting areas.

The Highways Bettering the Economy and Environment Act (**Highways BEE Act-H.R. 2381**) directs the Secretary of Transportation to use *existing*¹ authorities, programs and funding to encourage and facilitate IVM and pollinator habitat efforts by State DOTs and other transportation ROWs managers. The Secretary of Transportation would:

- Encourage IVM practices on roadsides and other transportation ROWs, including reduced mowing;
- Encourage native plantings (resulting in enhanced development of habitat for pollinators);
- Encourage “cooperative conservation” leveraging through partnerships and coordination with stakeholders in support of pollinators and native plantings;
- Conduct or facilitate research and demonstration projects on the economic and environmental benefits and best practices for IVM, reduced mowing and native plantings for pollinator habitat; and
- Report to Congress on actions being taken and recommendations.

The legislation also amends the existing eligibility account (Section 329) for control of noxious weeds and establishment of native species, by adding “*provision of habitat for pollinators.*”

Lead Sponsors: Reps. **Alcee L. Hastings (D-FL)** and **Timothy V. Johnson (R-IL)**. Additional cosponsors—Leonard Boswell (D-IA), Collin Peterson (D-MN), Tim Holden (D-PA) and Earl Blumenauer (D-OR).

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Additional Background:

- Management of highway ROWs has a number of important existing objectives, such as safety, drainage, water quality and invasive weeds management.
- A number of State DOT’s are leading innovators in pursuing ROWs management objectives through IVM, including reduced mowing, either voluntarily, or through legislation or policies at the State level (for example, Minnesota).
 - Maintenance cost savings of reduced mowing alone are reportedly 20-25%.
 - The Association of American State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) Vegetation Management Guidelines (March 2011) advances important IVM principles and recommendations consistent with the objectives of this legislation.
- Replacing fescues and similar grasses with biodiverse plantings of locally appropriate native forbs² and grasses can help reduce mowing requirements and costs over the longer term. Care should be taken to avoid species that increase forage attractiveness to deer and other large ungulates.
- Pollinators, such as bees, birds, bats, and butterflies, are essential to healthy ecosystems and are vital partners in American agriculture.
 - Pollinators are suffering drastic population loss, due in part to loss of habitat.
 - IVM, including **reduced mowing and enhanced plantings of native forbs and grasses**, can provide critical habitat and migratory corridors for pollinators, ground nesting birds and other small wildlife and improve pollination services for neighboring ag lands and other landscapes.

¹ NO new authorities, programs or mandates.

² Flowering plants whose leaves and stems die down to the ground at the end of each growing season.

27 NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS and BUSINESSES SUPPORTING H.R. 2381

**American Beekeeping Federation
American Farmland Trust
American Honey Producers Association
Blue Diamond® Growers
Burt's Bees
CropLife America
Defenders of Wildlife
Environmental and Energy Study Institute
Izaak Walton League of America
Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center
Lafarge
Monarch Watch
National Affairs and Legislation Cmte & Conservation Cmte, The Garden Club of America
National Audubon Society
National Bobwhite Technical Committee
National Farmers Union
National Gardening Association
National Garden Clubs, Inc.
National Grange
National Parks Conservation Association
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
Pollinator Partnership
Project Apis m.
The Conservation Fund
The Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation
United Fresh Produce Association
Waste Management, Inc.**

Group Letter Also Signed By:

187 Regional Organizations
46 Researchers
1,698 Individuals

Pollinator Partnership:

The Pollinator Partnership (P2) is a nonprofit organization headquartered in San Francisco, California. P2's mission is to catalyze stewardship of biodiversity. P2 places a high priority on efforts to protect and enhance animal pollinators (*invertebrates, birds and mammals*) and their habitats in both working and wild lands. P2 manages the North American Pollinator Protection Campaign (NAPPC), a growing, collaborative body of more than 140 diverse partners. NAPPC's respected scientists, researchers, conservationists and government officials and dedicated volunteers are succeeding with major programs to protect pollinators, raise issues related to pollinators, and benefit the health of all species – particularly those most threatened. More information about P2 and NAPPC may be accessed at www.pollinator.org and www.nappc.org.

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