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**LIFESTYLE**

# The making of a pollinator paradise at The Wilderness Center

**Sandra Chenal** Special to The Daily Record

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Driving along the tree shaded Alabama Avenue in Wilmot, the sun breaks out as the 5-acre pond comes into view. Beside it, a once thick brushy area bursts out an array of colors as the native wildflowers bloom from early spring to fall. Pollinators are easy to find here, and the native shrubs and wildflowers offer a diversity of resources for numerous insects, birds, mammals and reptiles.

It is a wonderful addition for The Wilderness Center's visitors. The prairie is in the foreground of the pond in the view from the large windows inside the nature center, and a starting point for several walking trails. The habitat restoration was all made possible with the cost incentives from the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), and a lot of hard work by The Wilderness Center employees.

Once the flowering shrubs were planted, the preparation for the wildflower planting started. Weed control is critical for success so the whole area was sprayed, the soil leveled, and a late summer seeding was conducted. Fourteen Native wildflower species with bloom periods ranging from early spring to late fall were planted with a no-till drill rented from the local Soil and Water Conservation District. It took some maintenance mowing and spot weed control the next year or two to help the native wildflowers to get established. Now there is always something in bloom for our pollinators!

The Wilderness Center also used the USDA Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) program to remove invasive species from their woodland and plant 9 acres of trees as well as plant a second pollinator field on their main property.

"EQIP funding helped us get so much more done in a shorter timeframe", senior biologist Gary Popotnik noted. "The conservation work fits well into our education program", he added.

The Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) is available for landowners and not-for-profit organizations who wish to improve wildlife habitat. The program is managed by the

USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), and it is designed to help landowners in installing wildlife habitat; the program does not cover all the costs. Applications are taken year-round. For more information contact your local NRCS office that can be found here: <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/contact/find-a-service-center>.

You can visit the pollinator meadow and walk any of the 12 miles of trails on The Wilderness Center's two public properties. To learn more about the education programs and other activities visit <https://wildernesscenter.org>.

The Pollinator Partnership is working with the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service to increase pollinator habitat in Ohio. June 19-25, 2023 is Pollinator Week. Pollinator Week is an annual celebration in support of pollinator health that was initiated and is managed by Pollinator Partnership.

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