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PARK COMMISSION DEVELOPS POLLINATOR HABITATS THROUGHOUT MERCER COUNTY

HOPEWELL TOWNSHIP – Open areas, large and small, all around the county are being turned into meadows attractive to bees, birds and other pollinators in an initiative led by the Mercer County Park Commission.

“There have been studies indicating a distressing decline in the bee population,” said Mercer County Executive Brian M. Hughes. “The county is in a position where we can dampen that alarming trend in our region.”

Bees, along with butterflies, beetles, birds and other species, are pollinators, considered one of the most important animals. Flowers can only reproduce with the help of a third party that transports pollen from the male to the female parts of the flower. This is the beginning of the fertilization process that creates seeds, known as pollination. Most flowering plants that produce fruits and vegetables are dependent on this process. A decrease in pollinators can have a devastating impact on food abundance and regional ecology.

Recognizing the importance of pollinators, the Mercer County Park Commission began to identify plots of open space to convert into pollinator habitat. The mission began in 2017 and has now transformed 11 areas, approximately 57 acres, into welcoming homes for pollinators. Eight additional meadows, totaling 77.4 acres, are in progress. Meadow development is funded by grants and the Mercer County Open Space Trust Fund.

“In addition to providing habitat for pollinating species, meadows also enhance local biodiversity by increasing the plant species, absorbing stormwater, and reducing emissions typically produced during lawn mowing,” said Jenn Rogers, Director of Stewardship. “Converting unused lawn to meadow has quite a number of benefits.”

Only a half-acre is needed to create a habitat that supports pollinator life cycles. In Ewing, a meadow was seeded in 2019 at the Senior Center. This small lawn-to-meadow restoration converted unused lawn into habitat, while also decreasing emissions from mowing. Acres of new pollinator habitat can be found in several municipalities around the county, including Hamilton, Ewing and Hopewell.

Many of the pollinator meadows are accessible via hiking trails at Baldpate Mountain and Rosedale Park. One meadow in Ewing Township is next to a playground at Village on the Green. Next year, look for many acres of new meadow at Mercer County Park.

“We get tremendous satisfaction in knowing that our efforts are going to the greater good,” said Park Commission Executive Director Aaron T. Watson. “We encourage county residents to create pollinator gardens in their own yards.”

For information on creating your own wildflower and pollinator garden, see websites hosted by the [Xerces Society](#), [Wild Seed Project](#), and the [National Fish and Wildlife Foundation](#).

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Photo: A meadow being created by Mercer County at Hopewell Borough Park.