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The Xerces Society receives $458,000 from the NRCS Conservation Innovation Program

Xerces Society and multiple partners will work to understand and protect habitat for pollinators and other beneficial insects

Portland, OR – Pollinators are essential to our environment. The ecological service they provide is necessary for the reproduction of nearly 70 percent of the world's flowering plants. This includes more than two-thirds of the world's crop species, whose fruits and seeds together provide over 30 percent of the foods and beverages that we consume. The United States alone grows more than one hundred crops that either need or benefit from pollinators. The economic value of insect-pollinated crops in the United States was estimated to be $18.9 billion in 2000. Native insects are responsible for pollinating at least $3 billion worth of these crops.

Native pollinators across the United States are in decline, especially in heavily managed landscapes. Managed pollinators, including honey bees, are in need of increased pollen diversity to help bolster their resistance to disease, pesticides, and other stresses. The 2008 Farm Bill explicitly establishes pollinators as a priority resource concern.

In response to this concern the Natural Resource Conservation Service has awarded two grants to the Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation.

$255,312 to *Develop and Test Pollinator Habitat Job Sheets for Six Regions of the U.S.*
Providing additional forage and refuge through on-farm natural habitat is widely recognized as important for enhancing pollinator health, diversity and abundance. Creating these habitat enhancements through the planting of adjacent pollinator meadows, bee pastures, or flowering hedgerows, however is not simply a matter of selecting regionally appropriate wildflowers. Rather these plantings need to be tailored to the specific cropping systems and include plants of greatest benefit to bees. For example, adjacent pollinator plantings need to be screened for appropriate bloom time, ensuring that floral competition does not exist with the primary crop. Similarly, these pollinator plantings need to be composed of species that will not become weeds in the primary crop, and they

should not serve as alternate hosts of crop pests and diseases.

The Xerces Society will work with regional partners to standardize pollinator seed mixes and habitat specifications for different agricultural industries and landscapes. Partners include the California Association of Conservation Districts, Oregon State University, the University of Wisconsin Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems and UW Department of Entomology, Pennsylvania State University, the Cape Cod Cranberry Growers Association and Plymouth Massachusetts Soil and Water Conservation District, and Straughn Farms of Waldo Florida.

"These plantings provide a win-win scenario, creating new opportunities for beneficial wildlife in agricultural settings," said Mace Vaughan Pollinator Program Director for the Xerces Society. "It will also provide direct economic benefits to farmers resulting from increased crop pollination and healthier honey bee colonies."

Also, critical to this project's success are the USDA NRCS Plant Material Centers (PMCs). Plant Material Centers play a vital role in helping the NRCS complete its mission of natural resource conservation. Six of the nation's 27 NRCS PMCs will help plant pollinator habitat as part of this project.

$202,631 to *Promote Agricultural Sustainability through Conserving Beneficial Insects: Restoring Pollination and Pest Control Services on Farms in California's Central Valley, Phase II*

In 2006, the Xerces Society, University of California at Berkeley, the Audubon California Land Owner Stewardship Program, and the Center for Land Based Learning initiated our Restoring Pollination Function on Farms in California's Central Valley project (with partial funding from a CA CIG grant and an NRCS Fish and Wildlife grant).

In Phase I of this project, we worked with six farms to plant buffers with pollinator habitat. We monitored bee communities before and after restoration at these sites and at twelve control sites. We presented dozens of workshops across California and developed a variety of NRCS publications that provide the technical information and specifications needed to implement pollinator habitat using NRCS Conservation Practices. We also developed a citizen science bee monitoring protocol for California's Central Valley.

Capitalizing on these successes, the UC Berkeley and the Xerces Society will expand this project to demonstrate how effectively these hedgerows recruit natural enemies of crop pests. We will use this information to develop guidelines for beneficial insect habitat and engage growers and NRCS staff through workshops across the state.

"If we hope to conserve biological diversity we must work within agricultural landscapes," said Scott Hoffman Black, Executive Director of the Xerces Society. "Both of these projects will provide vital information that will allow us provide habitat for pollinators and other beneficial insects which in turn will provide benefits for a broad variety of birds, fish and other animals."

Demonstrating a strong commitment to pollinator conservation and the quality of CIG project proposals, the NRCS is also funding the Pollinator Partnership of San Francisco, California to work with partners to develop pollinator project specifications for Montana, Ohio and Arizona, as well as to the Gold Ridge Conservation District of Occidental, California for a pilot project to enhance pollinator habitat on six farms in California's Sonoma County.