City of Austin

Austin, TX

Mayor Steve Adler

Pledge Summary

Austin, Texas is the 11th fastest growing metro area in the United States according to the United State Census Bureau. Despite this rapid growth The City of Austin has a strong history of wildlife conservation in the face of a rapidly changing climate. Austin was the first city in Texas to adopt the Mayor's Monarch pledge and has a long-standing history as a Community Wildlife Habitat through the National Wildlife Federation. Located in the heart of Texas, Austin sits along the central fly way of the monarch butterfly migration route and is dedicated to preserving and maintaining milkweed and nectar sources for the monarch's migration.

Action Items Committed for 2021

Communications and Convening

- Engage with community garden groups and urge them to plant native milkweeds and nectar-producing plants.
- Engage with city parks and recreation, public works, sustainability, and other relevant staff to identify opportunities to revise and maintain mowing programs and milkweed / native nectar plant planting programs.
- Create a community-driven educational conservation strategy, initiative, or practice that focuses on and benefits local, underserved residents.

Program and Demonstration Gardens

- Plant or maintain a monarch and pollinator-friendly demonstration garden at City Hall or another prominent or culturally significant community location.
- Convert vacant lots to monarch habitat.
- Plant milkweed and pollinator-friendly native nectar plants along roadsides, medians, or public rights-of-way.
- Launch or maintain an outdoor education program(s) (e.g., at schools, after-school programs, community centers and groups) that builds awareness and creates habitat by engaging students, educators, and the community in planting native milkweed and pollinator-friendly native nectar plants (i.e., National Wildlife Federation's Schoolyard Habitats program and Monarch Mission curriculum).
- Earn or maintain recognition for being a wildlife-friendly city by participating in other wildlife and habitat conservation efforts (i.e., National Wildlife Federation's Community Wildlife Habitat program).
- Initiate or support community science (or citizen science) efforts that help monitor monarch migration and health.
- Add or maintain native milkweed and nectar-producing plants in gardens in the community.
- Launch, expand, or continue an invasive species removal program that will support the re-establishment of native habitat for monarch butterflies and other pollinators.
- Display educational signage at monarch gardens and pollinator habitat.

Systems Change

- Change weed or mowing ordinances to allow for native prairie and plant habitats.
- Increase the percentage of native plants, shrubs and trees that must be used in city landscaping ordinances and encourage use of milkweed, where appropriate.
- Launch, expand, or continue an effort to change municipal planting ordinances and practices to include more native milkweed and native nectar producing plants at city properties.

Past Pledge Archive

Mayor Name	Program Year	Pledge Date	Achievement
Mayor Kirk Watson	2025	4/29/2025	
Mayor Kirk Watson	2024	3/29/2024	Signatories
Mayor Kirk Watson	2023	12/1/2022	Signatories
Mayor Steve Adler	2022	5/24/2022	Leadership Circle
Mayor Steve Adler	2021	4/28/2021	Leadership Circle

Action Items

In total, how many individuals have been reached through the Mayors' Monarch Pledge in your community this year (Jan-Dec)? Please limit your answer to only the number of individuals reached in the answer field below (Enter WHOLE NUMBERS only.).

377

Of the total number of individuals engaged, how many youth (0-18) were reached through the Mayors' Monarch Pledge in your community this year (Jan. - Dec.)? If none, please write 0." (Enter WHOLE NUMBERS only.)

123 youth, 254 adults

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In total, how many acres of monarch habitat have been created in your city in the last 12 months? Please limit your answer to only the number of acres in the answer field below (e.g., 3). Note: 1 acre = roughly the size of a football field.

1342

Where was the habitat created this year? Example locations may include residences, schools, places of worship, rights-of-way, roadsides, community gardens, shared public spaces, and more.

Nature Preserves, wildflower meadows in parks, grassland restoration on City conservation land, schools.

How are you leveraging the Mayors' Monarch Pledge program to engage marginalized communities, such as low-income communities or communities of color?

The Mayors' Monarch Pledge helped the Austin Parks and Recreation Department justify creating a new staff position to run the Wildlife Austin program. The Wildlife Austin Coordinator, who is herself a woman of color, managed two Austin Civilian Conservation Corps crews. The ACCC is a workforce development program with an equity focus. The Wildlife Austin Coordinator is now managing the ACCC program: estimated $5.2 mil over the next two years, providing workforce development and economic relief with an equity and conservation focus.

What was your community's motivation for taking and continuing to work on the Mayors' Monarch Pledge?

The motivation behind the Mayor's Monarch Pledge is to restore and enhance the habitat for Monarch butterflies in the City of Austin, specifically by incorporating the cultivation of native milkweed where feasible into the city's landscape portfolio at Austin City Hall, city-owned buildings and properties, as well as the city's vast preserve lands, parks, and open spaces. See the Mayor's Monarch Pledge resolution passed by the Austin City Council: https://www.austintexas.gov/edims/document.cfm?id=231467

What resources have been most helpful to you thus far and what new resources would you like to see to help meet your goals? What resources would be useful to help expand equitable engagement in community processes and access to high-quality, usable nature?

The Mayors' Monarch Pledge resolution from City Council allowed us to justify the creation of the Wildlife Austin staff position.

What else should we know about your monarch butterfly conservation efforts over the last year?

While public outreach has been reduced, we are in the process of developing and expanding new and existing programs to radically increase the capacity of the City, and Parks Department in particular, to implement ecological restoration at much larger scales. This will certainly restore and enhance monarch habitat in systems where grassland is the management goal. It will also help meet many of the City's goals related to climate preparedness, resiliency, and equity. The attention and additional resources provided as a result of the Mayor's Monarch Pledge has helped to facilitate these efforts.

Selected Action Items

Engage with community garden groups and urge them to plant native milkweeds and nectar-producing plants.

Please describe the groups you engaged with and how you engaged with these groups below.

Water Quality Protection Lands (WQPL) provided a grassland restoration site for a Girl Scout and the Bull Creek Foundation to plant 120+ milkweed plugs granted by Monarch Watch. Staff provided irrigation and guidance for the youth-led project. WQPL and Parks Land Management Program staff includes nectar-producing forbs in seed mixes. Staff and volunteers conduct 10+ seeding workdays per year and 20+ seed-collection workdays per year. Volunteers are often part of the Master Naturalist program which continues community outreach and volunteerism.

Engage with city parks and recreation, public works, sustainability, and other relevant staff to identify opportunities to revise and maintain mowing programs and milkweed / native nectar plant planting programs.

How many community organizations and groups participated? Please list them below.

Two City Departments: Watershed Protection and Parks and Recreation. Extensive community outreach was led by Watershed Protection Department.

Please describe the extent of engagement with these groups and revisions/maintenance implemented for mowing or planting programs.

The City of Austin has created no-mow areas which it calls "Grow Zones". These are primarily drainages or other water conveyances that have been traditionally mowed on a fixed schedule. We have reduced or eliminated mowing in these areas to save maintenance costs, reduce carbon emissions, and allow for regeneration of native plants. See the Grow Zone story map: https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/89b8ac76fb73460490418ef44df297ff

Create a community-driven educational conservation strategy, initiative, or practice that focuses on and benefits local, underserved residents.

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Please describe the process to create the strategy , the strategy goals and content, and/or results of implementation. Please also identify who was engaged in this process, what partnerships were established, and how you engaged these groups. Provide a link, if possible.

In 2019-2021, Austin updated its Community Climate Plan with a new focus on natural systems as well as equitable social and economic outcomes. During the process, the Austin Office of Sustainability created a Community Climate Ambassador Program to connect with historically underrepresented groups in conversations around energy, transportation, food, consumerism, and access to nature. The primary role of the ambassadors was to gather and share information about climate issues with their community and social circles. See the full Climate Equity Plan here: https://www.austintexas.gov/page/community-climate-ambassadors#:~:text=Recruiting%20the%20ambassadors,a%20pilot%20in%20November%202019.&text=The%20ambassadors'%20primary

Plant or maintain a monarch and pollinator-friendly demonstration garden at City Hall or another prominent or culturally significant community location.

Where is the demonstration garden located and how does this location relate to the cultural significance of the monarch (if relevant)? (Please provide an address or coordinates, if possible)

City Hall (301 W 2nd St, Austin, TX 78701); Zilker Cottage (2201 William Barton Dr, Austin, TX 78746). Please see this document that describes the cultural significance of the Zilker Cottage: https://www.austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Parks/Special_Events/Zilker/Park_Ranger_Station_at_Zilker_Caretaker_Cottage_program

What community organizations, groups, or leaders (if any) did you partner with or engage to complete this effort?

Austin Park Rangers, Ranger Cadet program (Akins High School)

What is the size of the demonstration garden (in acres)? Please limit your answer to only the number of acres in the answer field below (e.g., 0.5 acres). For reference, 1 acre = 43,560 square feet and is about the size of a football field without the end zones. Note: 1 acre = roughly the size of a football field.

.25

Launch or maintain an outdoor education program(s) (e.g., at schools, after-school programs, community centers and groups) that builds awareness and creates habitat by engaging students, educators, and the community in planting native milkweed and pollinator-friendly native nectar plants (i.e., National Wildlife Federation's Schoolyard Habitats program and Monarch Mission curriculum).

What program was launched or maintained to complete this effort? If you are involved with another National Wildlife Federation program, please mention that below. (Please include a link to the program, if possible)

Installation of NWF-sponsored monarch habitat at Travis High School.

How many schools, community groups, leaders, or centers were engaged in this effort? How many of these collaborations and partnerships are "new"? (Enter WHOLE NUMBERS only)

2

Please list the names of the schools you are working with.

Travis High School

What resources, if any, are you providing to educators?

Austin Park Rangers

How many students and educators would you estimate are being reached? Please limit your answer to only number of adults and youths engaged in the answer field (e.g., 200 students and 20 educators).

40 students, 3 teachers

What community organizations, groups, or leaders (if any) did you partner with or engage to complete this effort?

Friends of Blunn Creek Preserve

How many acres of monarch and pollinator habitat have been planted through this effort? Please limit your answer to only the number of acres in the answer field below (e.g., 0.5 acres). For reference, 1 acre = 43,560 square feet and is about the size of a football field without the end zones. Note: 1 acre = roughly the size of a football field.

1

What is the maintenance schedule to ensure planted habitat is maintained?

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Biology classes at Travis High School perform maintenance activities each semester.

Earn or maintain recognition for being a wildlife-friendly city by participating in other wildlife and habitat conservation efforts (i.e., National Wildlife Federation's Community Wildlife Habitat program).

What community organizations, groups, or leaders (if any) did you partner with or engage to complete this effort?

Xerces Society, Austin Nature and Science Center, Friends of the Austin Nature and Science Center, PolinATX

What program was launched or maintained to complete this effort? (Please include a link to the program, if possible)

Bee City Certification. https://beecityusa.org/

Initiate or support community science (or citizen science) efforts that help monitor monarch migration and health.

Upload any relevant documents, images, or other attachments related to your effort on this action.

Decker.pdf

Upload any relevant documents, images, or other attachments related to your effort on this action.

EmmaLong.pdf

Upload any relevant documents, images, or other attachments related to your effort on this action.

Indiangrass.pdf

How many estimated individuals participated in your community science effort? Please limit your answer to only the number of individuals reached in the answer field (Enter WHOLE NUMBERS only, e.g. 150).

8

What community organizations, groups, or leaders (if any) did you partner with or engage to complete this effort?

Monarch Joint Venture, Akins High School, individual volunteers

Please describe the community science program that you supported or initiated. Provide a link to any relevant programs, if possible.

The Science Coordinator from Monarch Joint Venture monitored three monarch habitat restorations and conducted a 1-day training on the integrated Monarch Monitoring Protocol for 8 Parks staff and Ranger Cadets (students at Akins High School). Austin Park Rangers also conduct one Bioblitz at the Rene Barrera Indiangrass Preserve every year. Participants identify as many pollinator species as possible.

Add or maintain native milkweed and nectar-producing plants in gardens in the community.

What community organizations, groups, or leaders (if any) did you partner with or engage to complete this effort?

Community garden users.

How many plants were planted? (Enter WHOLE NUMBERS only)

1000

Please describe your effort in completing this action.

Austin Parks and Recreation currently operates 29 Community Gardens. Nectar producing plants are encouraged and maintained at all or most community gardens. https://www.austintexas.gov/department/community-gardens-program

Launch, expand, or continue an invasive species removal program that will support the re-establishment of native habitat for monarch butterflies and other pollinators.

What is the total acreage of land treated to remove invasive plants? Note: 1 acre = roughly the size of a football field.

100

Please describe the extent of revisions or maintenance to invasive species removal programs, as well as the practices or techniques used to remove the invasive plants.

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Many invasive species removal program were continued in 2021. Such programs were operated by the Water Quality Protection Lands, Balcones Canyonlands Preserve, Austin Nature Preserve System, and Watershed Protection Department. The Parks and Recreation Dept Land Management Program also launched an invasive species survey across 10,000 acres of parkland natural area. Survey results will be included in a management plan for these lands and will be used to prioritize and direct invasive species removal projects in the future.

Change weed or mowing ordinances to allow for native prairie and plant habitats.

What community organizations, groups, or leaders (if any) did you partner with or engage to complete this effort?

Austin Code Enforcement

What is the status of this action? Please limit your answer to either "complete" or "in progress" in the answer field below.

Complete

If this action is Complete, please include the date it was completed and share a 1-2 sentence description. Please include a copy of the policy by uploading or linking below.

Austin allows habitat certification and habitat management plans to be used as an affirmative defense against ordinances that limit, for example, the height of herbaceous vegetation. City of Austin Code Enforcement officers regularly consult with the Wildlife Austin program coordinator regarding questions about certified habitats, native species, or urban habitat in general.
https://library.municode.com/tx/austin/codes/code_of_ordinances?nodeId=TIT10PUHESESA_CH10-5MIPUHERE_ART2SACOREPR

Launch, expand, or continue an effort to change municipal planting ordinances and practices to include more native milkweed and native nectar producing plants at city properties.

What community organizations, groups, or leaders (if any) did you partner with or engage to complete this effort?

Water Quality Protection Lands, Balcones Canyonlands Preserves, Parks and Recreation Dept Land Management Program, Austin Nature Preserve System, Parks and Recreation wildflower meadows, Watershed Protection Dept management of FEMA buyout properties, Watershed Protection Dept management of stormwater retention/detention ponds, Watershed Protection Dept and Parks and Recreation Dept management of Grow Zones (no-mow or limited-mow riparian areas)

What is the status of this action? Please limit your answer to either "complete" or "in progress" in the answer field below.

Complete

If this action is Complete, please include the date it was completed and share a 1-2 sentence description. Please include a copy of the policy by uploading or linking below.

https://library.municode.com/tx/austin/codes/environmental_criteria_manual?nodeId=ENCRMA

Increase the percentage of native plants, shrubs and trees that must be used in city landscaping ordinances and encourage use of milkweed, where appropriate.

What community organizations, groups, or leaders (if any) did you partner with or engage to complete this effort?

Watershed Protection Department, Code Enforcement Department

What is the status of this action? Please limit your answer to either "complete" or "in progress" in the answer field below.

complete

If this action is Complete, please include the date it was completed and share a 1-2 sentence description. Please include a copy of the policy by uploading or linking below.

https://library.municode.com/tx/austin/codes/environmental_criteria_manual?nodeId=S2LA

Convert vacant lots to monarch habitat.

Where is the monarch habitat located? (Please provide an address, if possible)

n/a

What community organizations, groups, or leaders (if any) did you partner with or engage to complete this effort?

n/a

What is the total acreage of land that has been converted? Please limit your answer to only the number of acres in the answer field below (e.g., 2 acres). For reference, 1 acre = 43,560 square feet and is about the size of a football field without the end zones. Note: 1 acre = roughly the size of a football field.

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0

How many lots were converted to monarch habitat? Please limit your answer to only the number of lots in the answer field below (e.g., 3)

0

Please describe when the lots were converted to monarch habitat and the planned maintenance schedule.

n/a

Display educational signage at monarch gardens and pollinator habitat.

How many garden signs are being displayed and where are they located? (Enter WHOLE NUMBERS only)

20

Please describe the educational information on the sign(s), and provide any links to externally purchased sign(s).

One sign at the display garden at the Zilker Cottage as well as several signs denoting the approximately 20 wildflower meadows throughout the parks system.

Plant milkweed and pollinator-friendly native nectar plants along roadsides, medians, or public rights-of-way.

Where are the medians, roadsides and public rights-of-way? (Please provide an address or coordinates, if possible, or describe the location)

n/a

How many milkweed and pollinator-friendly native nectar plants were planted? (Enter WHOLE NUMBERS only)

0

What is the total acreage of median and public right-of-way that has been planted with milkweed and pollinator-friendly native nectar plants? Note: 1 acre = roughly the size of a football field.

0

Please describe the maintenance schedule for these planted areas.

n/a

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