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 2022

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.
- Engage with gardening leaders and partners (e.g., Master Naturalists, Master Gardeners, Nature Centers, Native Plant Society Chapters , other long-standing and influential community leaders) to support monarch butterfly conservation.

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.
- 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.
- Host or support a native seed or plant sale, giveaway or swap.

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.).

0

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.)

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There were monarch / pollinator events held across the city in various formats. We were not able to get counts of total individuals who attended all such events.

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.

5

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 city of Austin goes to great lengths to actively consider historically underserved communities when planning events. As a result, recreation centers in such communities hold outdoor events to engage the community. The city is also actively incorporating the “social vulnerability index” as a heavily-weighted factor into its decision matrix to determine where large-scale habitat restoration efforts on Nature Preserve properties will be directed in the next 10 years.

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, cityowned 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?

Austin is a very ecologically aware and motivated city. As a result, there are MANY things being done at many levels across the community to benefit native species. There are also many certification programs in which the community participates. However, compiling information for all the various certifications requires an inordinate amount of time and effort, especially when one considers that each certification has its "own" format and requires its "own" text-heavy answers. It would help cities greatly if the requirements were much more data centric and not heavy on text that must be generated uniquely for each certification. For example, keep metrics like “how many acres of pollinator habitat did you maintain, enhance or create within the reporting period?” That is data that can be tracked and reported without taking too much time away from doing habitat work. Eliminate metrics that require a person to gather information from many people and write a text heavy answer for this report. For example, eliminate questions like “list all the partners, organizations, groups, leaders, etc. that were engaged to host this event”. Making staff detail who partners were and what roles they played and what were their motivations, etc. etc. creates unnecessary work that keeps those of us DOING habitat work from doing that work and, instead, spending more time than necessary filling out reports.

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

N/A

Selected Action Items

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

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.

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)

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)

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

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

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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).

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

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.

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

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.

Staff met with several HOAs and neighborhood groups and presented information encouraging them to remove invasive species and plant natives to benefit local pollinators.

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 To date, 83 acres have been shifted from a frequent mowing regime to a wildflower meadow status.

Engage with gardening leaders and partners (e.g., Master Naturalists, Master Gardeners, Nature Centers, Native Plant Society Chapters , other long-standing and influential community leaders) to support monarch butterfly conservation.

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

Austin Fire Department’s Wildfire Division Austin Public Library Austin Water Development Services Department’s Community Tree Preservation Division Housing and Planning Department Parks and Recreation Department Watershed Protection Department Zilker Botanical Garden Anderson PTSA Austin Independent School District Austin Organic Gardeners Austin Parks Foundation Beyond a Book Black Lives Veggies Capital Area Master Naturalists (CAMN) Central Texas Mycological Society Children's Research Center Concordia University Texas Dove Springs Proud Ecology Action of Texas Families in Nature Festival Beach Food Forest (FBFF) Friends of Dottie Jordan Park Friends of Grand Meadow Park Fruitful Commons Full Gallop Heartwood Community Garden Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center Mariposa Family Learning Center National Wildlife Federation Native Plant Society of Texas (NPSOT) Native Prairies Association of Texas North Lamar International Merchant District Parents as Teachers Partners for Education, Agriculture & Sustainability (PEAS) Patterson Park Community Garden Pease Park Conservancy Pricklethorn Presentations Red Salmon Arts St. Edward’s University Texas A&M Forest Service The Trail Conservancy Travis Audubon TreeFolks

Please describe the extent of engagement with these groups and their monarch butterfly conservation efforts.

14 presentations in support of monarch/pollinator conservation were given to community groups. Austin hosts its Roots and Wings Festival October 22nd through November 5th (https://rootsandwingsfest.com/about). During this time, partners hold many events of all types across the city to raise awareness of the plight of pollinators and to encourage citizens to plant native plants, go on nature walks, etc.

Host or support a native seed or plant sale, giveaway or swap.

How many plants were sold and/or given away at your event? (Enter WHOLE NUMBERS only)

The Ladybird Johnson Wildflower Center is the Austin area’s premiere native plant sale. They grow native plants throughout the year and host plant sales on weekends during the fall (late September through early November) and spring (Late March through early May). The spring 2022 sale sold 26,040 plant and the fall 2022 sale sold 16,300 native plants (sizes ranged from 4” to 5 gallon pots) for a total 42,340 native plants being sold at their native plant sales over 2022.

How many people attended your event? (Enter WHOLE NUMBERS only)

0

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What community organizations, groups, or leaders (if any) did you partner with or engage to host the event?

The Wildflower Center has many corporate sponsors supporting its efforts. These include: Asakura Robinson, Balcones Resources, Bartlett Tree Experts, Décor IQ, H-E-B, Tito's Handmade Vodka, Art Seen Alliance, Cicada Lighting, Madera Custom Homes, Native American Seed, Austin Wood Recycling, Blubiome, Central Texas Valet, Energy Renewal Partners, Fast Frame, Jerry's Art-a-rama, Juice Real Estate Group, OSO Electric Equipment, Port Enterprises, Texas Urban Sawmill, Waiting Made Easier, WayAround, Capital Printing, Meridian Hive, etc. There are also many nonprofit partners that support efforts of all kinds at the center including, The Native Plant Society of Texas, Texas Master Naturalist, etc.

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

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.

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).

33

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

Texas Parks and Wildlife, St. Edwards University, University of Texas

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

We use the iNaturalist platform and the bioblitz model to engage citizen scientists.

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?

The Zilker Botanical Garden continually works with volunteers to add more native pollinator habitat each year through their "Children's Garden Project". This year, 0.75 acres of pollinator habitat was created or enhanced with a to-date total of 5 acres.

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

0

Please describe your effort in completing this action.

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The Zilker Botanical Garden staff work with volunteers to accomplish these goals.

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.

215

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.

Many invasive species removal programs were continued in 2022. 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

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

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.

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