City of Austin

Austin, TX

Mayor Kirk Watson

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 2023

Communications and Convening

- 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.

Program and Demonstration Gardens

- Host or support a native seed or plant sale, giveaway or swap.
- Plant or maintain a monarch and pollinator-friendly demonstration garden at City Hall or another prominent or culturally significant community location.
- Initiate or support community science (or citizen science) efforts that help monitor monarch migration and health.
- Launch, expand, or continue an invasive species removal program that will support the re-establishment of native habitat for monarch butterflies and other pollinators.

Systems Change

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

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.).

1913

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.)

There were monarch / pollinator events held across the city in various formats and we do not track demographic information of attendees given the "open entry" nature of many 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.

109

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?

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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, 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?

N/A

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

N/A

Selected Action Items

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.

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 November) and spring (late March through May), as well as a one-day woody plant sale in January. The spring 2023 sale sold 24,287 plants, the fall 2023 sale sold 21,279 native plants, and the winter woody plant sale sold 742 plants (sizes ranged from 4” to 5 gallon pots) for a total 46,308 native plants being sold at their native plant sales over 2023.

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

8834

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)

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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

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).

1266

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

The City of Austin, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, many local organizations hosting sites

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.

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.

32

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 2023. 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. Volunteers do mechanical removals (hand pulling, weed wrenching) ACCC Crews do mechanical (chainsaw, handsaw, loppers, weed wrenches, etc) with follow up of herbicide cut stump treatments as needed. Some is chipped and dispersed on site, some chipped and hauled off for disposal, some is burned in piles.

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

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