City of Grand Rapids

Grand Rapids, MI

Mayor David LaGrand

Pledge Summary

Grand Rapids is a city in west Michigan with a population of nearly 200,000. Grand Rapids resides along the Grand River and is just under 30 miles from the shores of Lake Michigan. Mayor LaGrand is committed to working to protect monarch butterflies and other native pollinators by signing the Mayors' Monarch Pledge and supporting the ongoing pollinator conservation efforts by groups in the Grand Rapids community. Mayor LaGrand recognizes the important role played by the Upper Midwest in providing crucial summer habitat for monarch butterflies in their annual journey, and through this pledge seeks to highlight the role we can play in protecting this iconic species.

Action Items Committed for 2025

Communications and Convening

- Issue a proclamation to raise awareness about the decline of the monarch butterfly and the species' need for habitat. This proclamation must incorporate a focus on monarch conservation.
- Launch or maintain a public communication effort to encourage residents to plant monarch gardens at their homes or in their neighborhoods. (If you have community members who speak a language other than English, we encourage you to also communicate in that language; Champion Pledges must communicate in that language.)
- Create a community-driven educational conservation strategy, initiative, or practice that focuses on and benefits local, underserved residents.

Program and Demonstration Gardens

- Host or support a native seed or plant sale, giveaway or swap.
- Facilitate or support a milkweed seed collection and propagation effort.
- 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).
- 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.

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- Host or support a monarch butterfly festival that is accessible to all residents in the community and promotes monarch and pollinator conservation, as well as cultural awareness and recognition.

Past Pledge Archive

Mayor Name	Program Year	Pledge Date	Achievement
Mayor David LaGrand	2026	3/30/2026	
Mayor David LaGrand	2025	4/30/2025	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.).

1883

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.)

739

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.

1

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.

Residences, community gardens, public schools, and city parks

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

John Ball Zoo's Habitat Hero program, which contributes to many of the initiatives in the Grand Rapids Mayors' Monarch Pledge, are focused on engaging some of our local marginalized communities in pollinator conservation through plant giveaways and a pollinator-focused science curriculum for local 4th grade students.

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

Our primary motivation for engaging with the Mayors' Monarch Pledge was to highlight the work being done by groups around Grand Rapids to improve monarch butterfly habitat, as well as to further align and coordinate our efforts towards a shared larger goal.

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 webinars and the ease of access to program staff to answer questions has been very helpful. We would love to see more resources for helping municipalities implement these action items.

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

Anecdotally, many of the people that I interacted with through the spring and summer reported seeing more monarchs than in previous years. Either this means that people are more aware of the monarchs around them, or there are more monarchs in our community during the summer. Both of these are positive outcomes!

Selected Action Items

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.

10 acres

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.

In 2025 Friends of Grand Rapids Parks hired a contractor to prioritize invasive species removal based on botanical surveys completed by Calvin University. High quality sites and early detection species were the highest priority. Removing invasive species within 10 feet of trails was also prioritized as a means of reducing long-term maintenance and preventing exposure to ticks that carry lyme disease. Based on the plan, Friends of Grand Rapids Parks significantly increased the number of invasive species removal workdays, including weekly volunteer crew workdays. Additionally, new techniques, such as drill and fill for clonal species, were implemented.

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Facilitate or support a milkweed seed collection and propagation effort.

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

14

What species were collected or propagated?

Common Milkweed and 500+ more species

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

Calvin University, Plaster Creek Stewards and Calvin Ecosystem Preserve and Native Gardens

Please describe the milkweed seed collection and propagation effort that you hosted.

Over the course of the year Plaster Creek Stewards holds many volunteer and staff events to collect and process seeds as well as times to grow and transplant the seedlings into pots. These plants are used in restoration projects in the city and surrounding areas, both for residential sale, but also larger scale projects. This effort is shared by the Calvin Ecosystem Preserve and Native Gardens. The events represented above are a small sampling focused on Common Milkweed, but could be multiplied out to capture the total participation by volunteers and staff to grow the 500+ species of native plants, shrubs, and trees that we grow at our greenhouses. These species benefit more than Monarchs, serving diverse species of insects, birds, mammals and as a result our whole community.

Issue a proclamation to raise awareness about the decline of the monarch butterfly and the species' need for habitat. This proclamation must incorporate a focus on monarch conservation.

Date of Proclamation:

May 4-10, 2025

Title of Proclamation (i.e. – Monarch Day or Pollinator Week):

Mayors' Monarch Pledge Week

Upload a copy of your proclamation.

Mayors' Monarch Pledge Day Proclamation 2025.docx

Launch or maintain a public communication effort to encourage residents to plant monarch gardens at their homes or in their neighborhoods. (If you

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have community members who speak a language other than English, we encourage you to also communicate in that language; Champion Pledges must communicate in that language.)

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

Habitat Hero Newsletter May 2025.pdf

Please describe the methods of public communication below (e.g., printed materials, social media, print media).

As part of our Habitat Hero program, we send out a free monthly newsletter to participants with relevant native plant and pollinator information. The mailing list for this newsletter is around 3,000 recipients, and on average the open rate is 45-55%.

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.

John Ball Zoo's Habitat Hero program is a community science initiative aimed at improving urban pollinator habitat by giving away 2,000+ native plants to community members in and around Grand Rapids. We partner with neighborhood associations, farmer's markets, and local universities to provide these free native perennials to segments of the community who otherwise would not have ready access to native plants. By focusing on residents and their private properties, we are working to improve habitat quality and connectivity in areas that are traditionally harder to reach with habitat improvement efforts. Habitat Hero webpage: https://jbzoo.org/habitat-hero/ Habitat Hero plant dashboard: https://www.arcgis.com/apps/dashboards/bff6862602eb45dc910e71c7bf376100

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)

2224

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

1144

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

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John Ball Zoo

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).

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

Habitat Hero Map of the Year.xlsx

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)

Habitat Hero

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)

13

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

Center for Economicology Cesar E Chávez Elementary School Buchanan Elementary School Harrison Park Academy School Brookside Elementary School Godfrey Elementary School Sibley Elementary School Palmer Elementary School Kent Hills Elementary School Shawmut Hills Academy Riverside Middle School Aberdeen Academy Southwest Elementary Academia Bilingue

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

Worksheets, binoculars, field guides, choice boards, supplemental materials, plants, bird feeders, seeds

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).

739 students, 35 educators

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

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John Ball Zoo, Monarch Joint Venture (symbolic migration), LGROW (Lower Grand River Organization of Watersheds), Plaster Creek Stewards

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.

0.5

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

Students and educators maintain beds during the school year. Educators have coordinated with facilities to maintain the beds during the summer.

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.

Screenshot 2025-11-12 110827.png

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).

77

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

John Ball Zoo, Calvin University, Kent County Parks

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

We participated in the Monarch Larva Monitoring Project. https://mlmp.org/ We tagged and released monarchs with zoo guests.
https://monarchwatch.org/tagging/index.html#recoveries

Host or support a monarch butterfly festival that is accessible to all residents in the community and promotes monarch and pollinator conservation, as well as cultural awareness and recognition.

How many estimated individuals attended the event? Please limit your answer to only the number of individuals reached in the answer field ((Enter WHOLE NUMBERS

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only), e.g. 500)

4451

What was the date of your festival?

September 13th

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

John Ball Zoo, Land Conservancy of West Michigan

Please describe the details of your monarch butterfly festival and how you ensured the event was accessible by all residents in the community (e.g., events, length, notable successes, outreach, location).

John Ball Zoo's Monarch Day celebration is aimed at sharing the many monarch and other pollinator conservation activities that the zoo is involved in. This event day includes monarch tagging and releases, other educational booths, and milkweed giveaways. This event is marketed directly to zoo audiences, as well as more broadly to the west Michigan community through local tv stations.

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

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

IMG_3027_SECOM.jpeg

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

John Ball Zoo, SECOM, The Garden Guru

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

93

Please describe your effort in completing this action.

These plants were planted at a local community garden through a grant received by the zoo. The community garden is run by one of the zoo's community partners, and the installation was completed by a local landscape design company. Zoo staff and volunteers assisted with the planting.

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