City of Decorah

Decorah, IA

Mayor Andy Carlson

Pledge Summary

The city of Decorah, population 7,500, is located along the Upper Iowa River in the Driftless Region of Northeast Iowa. The area is known for its beautiful scenic bluffs, numerous springs and waterfalls, and many acres of public parks and wildlife areas for trout fishing, kayaking, hiking, biking, and simple enjoyment of the natural environment. In 2001, the City, in partnership with numerous organizations and individuals, established a prairie reconstruction to facilitate stream bank protection, and water quality improvement along the Upper Iowa River. A 11.4 acre filter strip was planted with native grasses and forbs, and the following year, a ½ acre butterfly garden and additional 24.1 acre prairie was constructed to protect the floodplain. The butterfly garden and prairie serve as an oasis in town- a place to hike, cross-country ski, a location for students (elementary through college) to study, and an inspiration to local citizens to undertake similar plantings on their own property. Art in the Park, after school programs, Monarch tagging events, seed collection, Luther College Cross Country training, to name a few, are activities that the community enjoys at little to no cost!

Action Items Committed for 2026

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

Systems Change

- 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.

Program and Demonstration Gardens

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

Past Pledge Archive

Mayor Name	Program Year	Pledge Date	Achievement
Mayor Andy Carlson	2026	1/22/2026	
Mayor Lorraine Borowski	2025	4/30/2025	Signatories

Action Items

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.

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

Our city has existing prairies and gardens that naturally bring in monarchs and other pollinators alike. We want to continue to protect monarch butterflies and other pollinators while also creating opportunities to make our community more environmentally friendly. We recognize the importance of providing healthy habitats through native plants, pollinator gardens, and prairie spaces. Continuing the pledge gives us a way to build on those efforts and educate residents.

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?

Resources that showcase best practices for communities similar to ours.

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.).

80

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.

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Community Gardens, Butterfly Garden, Public Parks, Road Sides/Right of Ways, Shared Public Spaces

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

We offer events/programs that are free of charge and acceptable for all ages and abilities. Guest speakers come from a variety of backgrounds and expertise to share their knowledge and experience with the public.

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.)

45

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

See Annual Report for more information!

Selected Action Items

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

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.

Please describe the maintenance schedule for these planted areas.

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

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

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

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

15

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

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Local 4-H group, Winneshiek County Fair Board, Winneshiek County Extension and Outreach, Iowa State Extension Specialist, Northeast Iowa RSVP and Winneshiek County Conservation

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

2026 Priarie Seed Harvest.pdf

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

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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.

• Winneshiek County Master Gardeners Operated through Iowa State University Extension, this group includes skilled volunteers trained in horticulture who frequently lead workshops, plantings, and pollinator-friendly projects. They are excellent partners for establishing milkweed gardens, hosting educational events, and maintaining public pollinator spaces. • Winneshiek County Conservation & Decorah Parks & Recreation These agencies manage local natural areas and prairies, including the Decorah Community Prairie & Butterfly Garden. Staff and volunteers already support pollinator habitats, making them ideal collaborators for expanding monarch-friendly plantings and coordinating community workdays. • Driftless Chapter of Iowa Master Naturalists / Local Naturalists Local naturalists provide ecological expertise and help lead habitat restoration projects, citizen science efforts (e.g., monarch monitoring), and outreach programs. • Local Native Plant Enthusiasts & Iowa Native Plant Society Members (Northeast Iowa Region) Native plant advocates can help select appropriate prairie species, advise on pollinator-supportive landscaping, and promote the use of regionally adapted plants in public and private gardens. • Seed Savers Exchange Located just outside Decorah, Seed Savers Exchange is a nationally recognized nonprofit with extensive expertise in heirloom plants, seed conservation, and pollinator-friendly gardening. They offer educational programming, plant sales, and opportunities for collaborative demonstration gardens. • Luther College Sustainability & Biology Departments Luther maintains multiple prairie and research areas, including pollinator plots used by faculty and students. Partnering with them can bring youth engagement, research support, and volunteer capacity to monarch projects. • Local garden clubs and long-standing gardening leaders Decorah has a strong gardening culture, with many knowledgeable long-time gardeners who often volunteer in community beautification and conservation efforts. Their involvement can help with plant propagation, mentoring, and establishing demonstration pollinator gardens.

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

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2026 Community Prairie & Butterfly Garden Annual Report.pdf

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.

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

2026 Prairie Restoration Projects.pdf

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

2026 IRVM Project.pdf

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

2026 Carlson Park Restoration Project.pdf

If this action is In Progress, please describe your progress and a target date when you plan to complete action.

So far, we have established prairie restoration areas in Carlson Park, Rowel Sports Complex and along Pulpit Rock Road. We are now part of IRVM which allows additional funding and access to seeds. In 2026, we purchased a Harley rake and hydro seeder in efforts to create and maintain native areas.

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

City of Decorah Parks and Recreation, Winneshiek County Conservation, Winneshiek County Roadside Management, Sustainability, Public Works

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

In Progress

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.

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

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• Winneshiek County Master Gardeners Operated through Iowa State University Extension, this group includes skilled volunteers trained in horticulture who frequently lead workshops, plantings, and pollinator-friendly projects. They are excellent partners for establishing milkweed gardens, hosting educational events, and maintaining public pollinator spaces. Their booth at the county fair displays monarch life stages/cycle, habitat, pollinators and migration. • Winneshiek County Conservation & Decorah Parks & Recreation These agencies manage local natural areas and prairies, including the Decorah Community Prairie & Butterfly Garden. Staff and volunteers already support pollinator habitats, making them ideal collaborators for expanding monarch-friendly plantings and coordinating community workdays. • Driftless Chapter of Iowa Master Naturalists / Local Naturalists Local naturalists provide ecological expertise and help lead habitat restoration projects, citizen science efforts (e.g., monarch monitoring), and outreach programs. • Local Native Plant Enthusiasts & Iowa Native Plant Society Members (Northeast Iowa Region) Native plant advocates can help select appropriate prairie species, advise on pollinator-supportive landscaping, and promote the use of regionally adapted plants in public and private gardens. • Seed Savers Exchange Located just outside Decorah, Seed Savers Exchange is a nationally recognized nonprofit with extensive expertise in heirloom plants, seed conservation, and pollinator-friendly gardening. They offer educational programming, plant sales, and opportunities for collaborative demonstration gardens. • Luther College Sustainability & Biology Departments Luther maintains multiple prairie and research areas, including pollinator plots used by faculty and students. Partnering with them can bring youth engagement, research support, and volunteer capacity to monarch projects. Professors often speak during public events to engage and educate community members. • Local garden clubs and long-standing gardening leaders Decorah has a strong gardening culture, with many knowledgeable long-time gardeners who often volunteer in community beautification and conservation efforts. Their involvement can help with plant propagation, mentoring, and establishing demonstration pollinator gardens.

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

Fairgoer observing a monarch butterfly (1).jpeg

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

IMG_9792.jpeg

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

Judy Mowry a Winneshiek County Master Gardener releasing monarch butterflies (1).jpg

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

1. Winneshiek County Master Gardeners (20 Master Gardeners) 2. St. Benedict's School (20 youth) 3. Winneshiek County 4-H 4. Winneshiek County fairgoers (616 plus people visited the booth each day of the fair) 5. Earth Day Festival attendees (450 people visited the Earth Day Festival)

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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.

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

Collaborating with these groups helps to envision best practices for future areas and how to best maintain what we already have established. Mowing programs with county will help reduce mowing all together, and is something the city would like to do more of. The City of Decorah Parks and Recreation has been key to maintaining native areas and creating new ones where applicable, discussing needs for the existing areas and how to populate other areas to attract pollinators. This year, a new sections of native plantings were established thanks to Water Quality Initiative Grants and IRVM, located in Carlson Park (13 acre), our old Wastewater Treatment Plant (3 acre), the Rowley Sports Complex (6) and along the bike trail near Will Baker Park (1 acre)

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

City of Decorah Parks and Recreation, Winneshiek County Roadside Management, Sustainability and Public Works

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)

The Decorah Community Prairie, 4 Ohio Street, Decorah, IA 52101. A pre-existing prairie and butterfly garden that consists of 34+ acres for community members and volunteers to enjoy, right along the Upper Iowa River. This area hosts several events, including Monarch Butterfly Tagging, Seed Harvesting, and Prairie Restoration and Management. This area also serves has classroom for Luther College students/professors and for the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation. Smaller areas of native plantings have been established in "pocket" gardens in downtown Decorah at Dry Run Plaza (301 E Water Street, Decorah, IA) and Oneota Food Co-op (312 W Water Street, Decorah, IA). In 2024, the Miller Park Project was completed and was seeded with natives and pollinators in mind and we were able to view the benefits this spring/summer (Pleasant Ave, Decorah, IA). Newly established areas include one acre along Pulpit Rock Road (137 Pulpit Rock Road) that is part of City of Decorah prairie restoration projects, along with Carlson Park and the old Waste Water Treatment Plant.

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

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City of Decorah, Master Gardeners, volunteer groups/RSVP, ISU Extension Offices, Winneshiek County 4-H

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

2026 Community Prairie & Butterfly Garden Annual Report.pdf

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.

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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 1, 2026

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

Mayors Monarch Pledge Day

Upload a copy of your proclamation.

2026 Mayors Proclamation.pdf

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