

May 13, 2024

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
The Capitol S-128
Washington, DC 20515

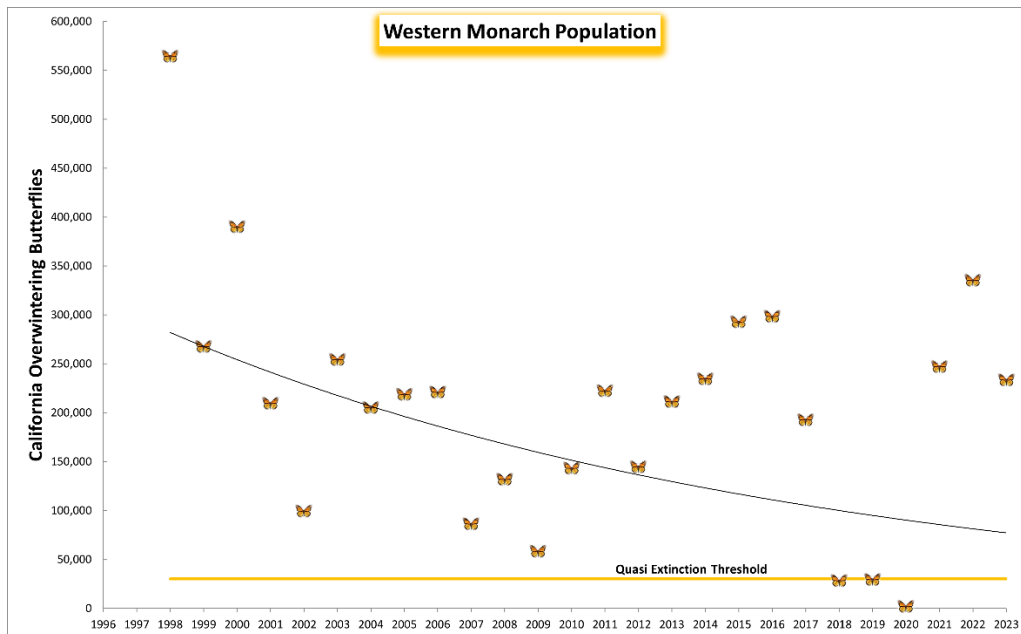
The Honorable Susan Collins
Vice Chair
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
The Capitol S-128
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Tom Cole
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
The Capitol H-307
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
1036 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chair Murray, Vice Chair Collins, Chair Cole, Ranking Member DeLauro,

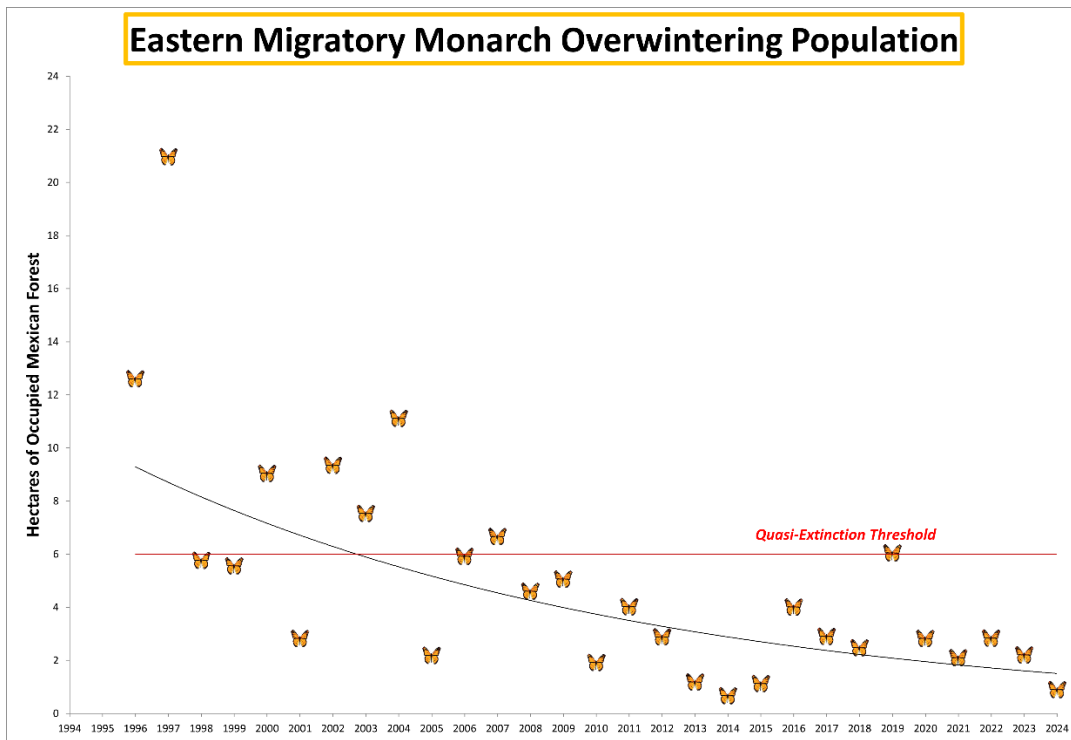
Monarch butterflies, one of the most beloved butterflies in the United States, and once the most common, are now the face of the wildlife extinction crisis. In the past two decades, monarch populations have plummeted more than 90%, dramatically increasing the likelihood of extinction. Without emergency help from Congress, the western population of monarch butterflies, which famously winters on the California coast each year, could collapse. While these beautiful pollinators are trying to make a comeback, their population remains at just 5% of what it once was.



For the eastern population of monarchs – which overwinters in Mexico – the latest annual count was the second lowest ever recorded. Eastern monarchs declined by nearly 60% from the previous year and the population is only 1/6 the size needed to be out of the danger zone of migratory collapse. The situation is now dire and urgent help is desperately needed. Thus, we

request that you significantly increase funding for the conservation of monarch butterflies to \$100 million per year starting in fiscal year 2024. This level of funding would cover the cost of restoring one million acres of milkweed and pollinator habitat per year so that the butterfly’s populations can grow large enough to be resilient to threats from habitat loss, pesticides, severe weather, and climate change.¹

Monarchs are collapsing due to landscape-scale threats from climate change, pesticides, and development. The large-scale use of herbicides that destroy milkweed — the monarch caterpillar’s sole food source — was the primary driver of the butterfly’s initial decline. Since the 1990s monarchs have lost about 167 million acres of summer breeding habitat to agricultural intensification and suburban sprawl. Milkweed has been nearly eradicated from areas of the Midwest where monarchs are typically born, and scientists estimate that billions of milkweed plants have been wiped out due to increased herbicide use. Reversing that trend by actively restoring milkweed and other pollinator habitat is critical to ensure the long-term survival of the monarch butterfly by increasing population numbers to levels that are resilient to climate disasters.



In addition to direct loss of milkweed and nectar flowers, monarchs are threatened by neonicotinoids and other systemic insecticides and a variety of agents used in agriculture, parks, yards, and commercial properties. Monarchs can be directly killed by exposure to insecticides used to treat pests such as moths, grasshoppers, and mosquitos.

Adding insult to injury, the climate crisis is undermining the stable weather conditions and predictable flowering seasons that monarchs need to complete their migration. Climate change also threatens these butterflies’ overwintering habitat in the mountain forests of Mexico. The

¹ According to Monarch Watch, the costs of restoration and maintenance of milkweeds and nectar plants ranges from \$100-\$1000 per acre.

oyamel fir stands where monarchs roost are suffering from progressively hotter, drier temperatures and are now subject to forest fires year-round. It is now expected that the International Monarch Biosphere Reserve in Mexico will become climatically unsuitable for monarchs by the end of the century. To make matters worse, avocado production in Mexico is resulting in widespread deforestation within the Reserve. As of 2018, nearly 2,400 acres have been converted into avocado plantations, representing 2% of the Reserve's land base.

While the Natural Resources Conservation Service and other federal agencies have taken some initial steps toward slowing the monarch's decline — including implementing the Monarch Butterfly Habitat Development Project and creating the Center for Pollinator Conservation — monarchs desperately need more funding and an even greater commitment from Congress to ensure their long-term survival.

The 2015 *National Strategy to Promote the Health of Honey Bees and Other Pollinators* set a short-term goal of 225 million butterflies at the overwintering locations in Mexico occupying an area of 15 acres (6 hectares). This is the bare minimum needed to avoid extinction and is not a long-term goal for stability. Unfortunately, the latest annual count for 2023 found overwintering monarchs occupying just .90 hectares—or only 2.2 acres. This is the first time since the 2013-2014 overwintering season that eastern monarchs occupied less than one hectare. Funding this strategy will require a substantial increase in resources to not only stem the rapid decline of monarchs but to get them on a path towards recovery.

* * *

The world is in the midst of a staggering wildlife extinction crisis unlike anything humans have ever experienced before and on a scale and pace unseen in millions of years. Wildlife populations around the world are crashing at alarming rates and with distressing frequency. One million species are heading towards extinction. Millions more are declining.

Scientists warn of an insect apocalypse as populations of once-common pollinators and other insects plummet around the world. Monarch butterflies once numbered in the billions and covered 10 hectares of overwintering forest. Countless generations celebrated their spectacular beauty and epic, life-affirming migrations. Dedicating \$100 million a year to monarch conservation gives these beloved butterflies a fighting chance at survival.

We sincerely hope Congress will step up to the challenge and help save one of the world's most iconic butterflies from further decline.

Sincerely,

Center for Biological Diversity
Animal Welfare Institute
Christian Council of Delmarva
DC Natives
Down to Earth Apiaries
Earth Path Sanctuary
Endangered Habitats League
Environmental Protection Information Center- EPIC

Friends of the Earth
Howling For Wolves
Los Angeles Audubon Society
Los Padres Forest Watch
New Hampshire Audubon
Northern California Council, Fly Fishers International
Northwest Center for Alternatives to Pesticides
NYC Plover Project
Oceanic Preservation Society
Resource Renewal Institute
Rocky Mountain Wild
The Urban Wildlands Group
Voices of Wildlife in NH
Zoo New England: Franklin Park Zoo & Stone Zoo