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NEWAYGO COUNTY ENVIRONMENTAL COALITION

NCEC NEWS

The Environmental Resource Hub for Newaygo County

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The Newaygo County Environmental Coalition aims to foster an educated, active, and collaborative community dedicated to protecting, respecting, and promoting a sustainable natural world.

February NCEC & Ally Events

Native Plant Seed Sowing: Winter Milk Jug Greenhouse

Saturday 2/7
10am-12:30 pm
Newaygo Congregational UCC
432 Quarterline St, Newaygo

In this workshop, you will create a mini-greenhouse from a common milk jug and sow native plant seeds in it. You will take your mini-greenhouse home, place it outside for the rest of the winter, and watch the seeds sprout and grow as the weather warms.

Free Registration

Trivia Takeover

Tuesday 2/26
6-8 pm

Newaygo Brewing Company

Why so serious? Come join Friends of the Muskegon River (MRWA and NCEC) as we takeover trivia at Newaygo Brewing Company. An evening of fun, laughter, and community.

Click above to visit our website calendar

MUSKEGON RIVER WATERSHED ASSEMBLY
Photo Courtesy of Kevin Feenstra

Lower Muskegon Watershed Management Plan Information Sessions

Muskegon River Water Assembly (MRWA) is hosting community information sessions on the Lower Muskegon Watershed Management Plan. Each session is designed with a different target group in mind.

Session for the General Public

February 18th 6-7:30 pm
Fremont Area District Library
104 E Main St, Fremont

This session will overview the management plan and priority projects, discuss how local input shapes restoration efforts, and provide information on ways you can stay involved in protecting the watershed. Your questions and feedback help guide MRWA's work for a thriving watershed.

More Info on General Public Session

Session for Farmers and Members of the Agricultural Community

February 25th 7:30am-9 am
Stone Lodge
4707 Trillium Springs Blvd, Fremont

This practical info session will walk through the Management Plan, discuss how agricultural infrastructure and practices can support clean water, give examples of real-world conservation practices, and gather input from farmers and land workers. Your experience on the land is essential as we work toward clean water and sustainable farms for the community and the Muskegon River watershed.

More Info on Agricultural Session

Session for Local Government Officials

February 25th @ 12:00 pm - 1:30 pm
Fremont Area Community Foundation
4424 West 48th Street, Fremont

This session is designed for elected officials, managers, administrators, zoning and planning commissioners, and others. During this info session, government representatives will review key priorities, discuss implementation tools, and explore opportunities to align local policies with watershed health. Your participation helps connect everyday decisions with long-term protection of the Muskegon River and its communities.

More Info on Local Government Session

February Habitat Workday

TLC Habitat Workdays at Coolbaugh Natural Areas

Saturday 2/7 & Saturday 2/14

10 am - 1 pm

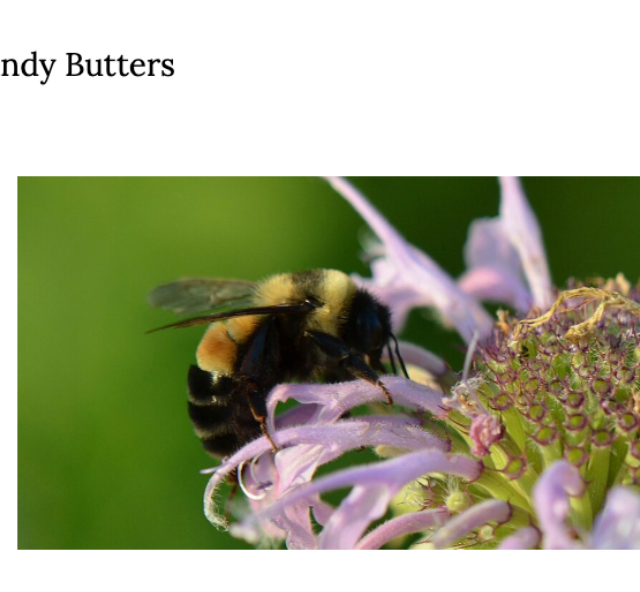
We will be thinning oak and white pine to preserve the prairie landscape, and burning brush piles. Wear weather-appropriate clothing, solid-footwear, and bring work gloves, a water bottle, and tools if you have them. Arrive by 10am if able, but come anytime that you can! You do not need to stay the whole time. Any and all work is much appreciated!

Don't park in the parking lot! Instead, meet us at: 43°26'57.6"N 85°45'15.4"W, on the north side of 58th street. We should be visible from the road!

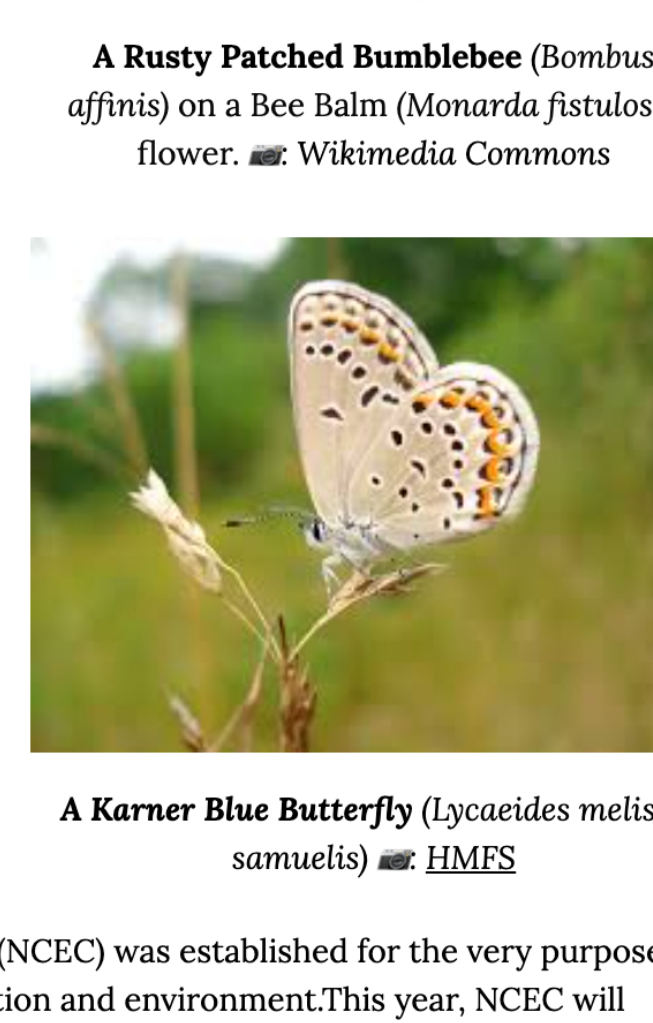
If the workday is canceled due to weather, an email announcement will be sent and you can also check the NCEC web calendar for cancelation updates.

Announcing the NCEC Pollinator Pathways Initiative

Written by: Randy Butters



A Rusty Patched Bumblebee (*Bombus affinis*) on a Bee Balm (*Monarda fistulosa*) flower. 📷: *Wikimedia Commons*



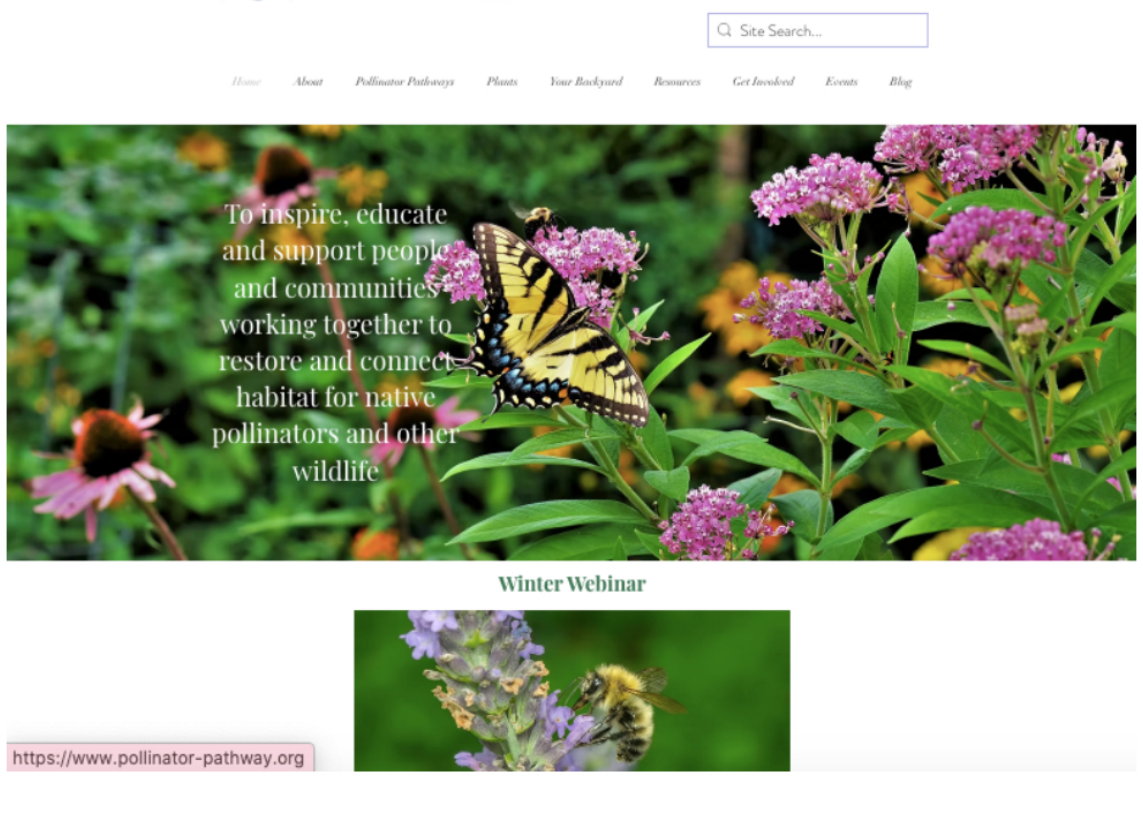
A Karner Blue Butterfly *(Lycaeides melissa samuelis)* 📷: HMFS

One of every three bites of food on the table exists because of pollinators. Yet, all types of pollinators have been declining at alarming rates since the early 1990s. In the first months of 2025, around 60% of commercial non-native honeybee colonies in the US died. Native pollinators have fared even worse: nearly one quarter of them are currently at significant risk of extinction. Many native bumblebees have mostly disappeared from their known, historic ranges.

Last year, Michigan beekeepers reported colony losses well above the national average. At the same time, native bumblebee species in Michigan have seen extreme declines. Some of them, like the rusty patched bumblebee, have disappeared from the vast majority of their known, historic ranges. Many factors account for these trends: including pesticides, pests, and pathogens. Habitat loss is of critical concern for pollinators, and it is the number one threat leading to the species extinction.

The Newaygo County Environmental Coalition (NCEC) was established for the very purpose of locally addressing critical issues of conservation and environment.This year, NCEC will address the threats to pollinators here in our area. Specifically NCEC will take on the issue of pollinator habitat fragmentation and loss.This will be a landscape-scale, strategic initiative, aimed at creating and preserving ecosystems. This will support pollinators, such as bees, butterflies, and other insects. We plan to create pathways connect pollinator habitats through a network of gardens, parks, and green spaces, allowing them safe spaces and movement.

In the early 2000s, Seattle area artist Sarah Bergman created a discipline-spanning project called Pollinator Pathways. Her 2007 published work, Pollinator Pathways Toolkit, has served as proven model for success. By 2017, pollinator-pathway.org began what has become a nationwide organization inspiring, educating and supporting people and communities to restore and connect habitat for native pollinators and other wildlife.



Pollinator Pathway

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Home About Pollinator Pathways Plants Your Backyard Resources Get Involved Events Blog

To inspire, educate and support people and communities working together to restore and connect habitat for native pollinators and other wildlife

Winter Webinar

https://www.pollinator-pathway.org

This year, NC-EC will start the process of building our own local, pollinator pathway. We will follow the proven methods of other groups that have already been successful. We will begin with a core group that can help us identify areas of high conservation value and then connect them with a real-life, mappable pathway. This will be done by planting native flowers, shrubs, and trees, and pollinator-friendly gardens which offer nectar and pollen throughout the growing season.

Our communities can have a significant protective impact on pollinators. The pathways we build together will provide essential food and nesting resources; in the process, biodiversity will be enhanced and pollinators will be supported. ultimately food for humans will benefit, and our own ecosystem will benefit.

If you'd like to follow the pathway, to learn more, and/or join the Pollinator Pathway Initiative, contact: Rowan.O@nc-ec.org.

Planting for Pollinators: A Conversation with Sarah Pregitzer

Interview and Editing by Rowan O'Mara

In preparation for the upcoming growing season, we interviewed NCEC board chair and Master Naturalist Sarah Pregitzer, who has a wealth of knowledge to offer about the role of pollinators in our ecosystem as well as easy ways to get started with planting for pollinators in your yard or in the community.

Pollinator initiatives have been taking off all over the nation. Why are people getting interested in Planning for Pollinators?

I think most people who've been around for a while have noticed that there aren't as many bugs as there used to be. I remember seeing 150 tiger swallowtails in a puddle, and you just don't see that anymore. I haven't seen a luna moth in maybe 15 years? They're just not around like they used to be.

And of course, one in three bites of food we eat depends directly on pollinators. Really the only things that don't are the grasses like wheat, that are pollinated by wind, and the things that can eat grasses, like sheep and goats and cows. But all of our fruits and vegetables have to be pollinated.

Who are the "biggest" pollinators around here?

That's hard to know, but if I were to guess, I'd say probably hover flies. They can travel longer distances than most other pollinators, which is an advantage to them in a fragmented habitat. After that I'd think the native bees are some of the most numerous, especially the common bumblebee. There are way fewer honeybees than there used to be. Some folks, myself included, keep them for pollinator services, but they don't outnumber the native bees.

What can I do to support pollinators in my yard?

Give them places to live their lives! Our pollinators need native plants to collect nectar and pollen from. A lot of non-native plants, they don't recognize as food sources.
Of course, the pollinators also need somewhere to get a drink. You can provide this with a bird bath, or a bowl sunk into the ground, or even a small depression you dig out and line with plastic or clay. Just make sure to keep some rocks in there: pebbles, or flat river stones, will gilve them a place to climb out.

The last thing our pollinators need is nesting space. The mason bees need wood to burrow into, so I like to keep some wood in my garden, like an old piece of driftwood. And our bumblebees need bare ground to burrow into, so in year two or three, pull back some of that mulch under your tall plants (like asters) and just leave the soil exposed.

And please don't spray pesticides, or buy "pest-resistant" plants. Plants labeled as "pest-resistant" contain Neonicotinoid which harms vulnerable insect communities.

Which plants should I plant?

There is a great native plant for every circumstance!

There are three primary things you should consider: your soil, the amount of moisture it holds, and the light conditions in the garden space. Nurseries often have catalogues that will show you each plant's requirement for those elements – they should be willing to give you one if you ask! We like **Prairie Moon** from Minnesota, and **StanTec** from Michigan.

You may want to consider bloom time – picking a few plants that bloom in each part of the growing season keeps your garden colorful, and can help support pollinators in the fall, when they are preparing for winter and flowers are getting much more scarce.

If you want a specific pollinator, you can plant their host plant. Clearwing, or hummingbird moths, need snowberry bushes to reproduce, and I love those little guys. So I planted one, then another snowberry bush, and within a couple years of the second planting I had clearwing moths all over those bushes. And of course, the local famous pollinator, the karner blue butterfly's caterpillars need our native lupine, now called sundial lupine. They won't eat anything else. Beware of horticultural strains of lupine, or imports from the Western USA – it can hybridize with our native lupine, but the caterpillars can't live on the leaves from that plant.

How should I prepare my space for planting?

I don't recommend digging up the space you want to plant – this gives the seeds already stored in the soil a chance to germinate, and they may or may not be what you're looking for. Instead, trim any grass down as low as you can and cover it to kill it. Newspaper (5-7 layers deep!) can be left in place and covered with mulch, while black plastic tarps should be removed to avoid suffocating the soil. If you use the newspaper/mulch combination, you shouldn't have to really weed for at least 3-5 years. I never recommend landscape cloth, as it is basically plastic you're putting in your soil. You don't want that in your own food, well neither do the pollinators.

I also like to edge my gardens. A square-nosed shovel works just fine for the task, just dig straight down and towards your flowerbeds, making a sort-of triangle of removed earth. This "air trench" will stop the turf grass from sending runners into your garden.

Your Questions Are Next!

Is there something you've always wondered about pollinators? Do you need ideas or advice for planting in your own yard? Fill out our online form between now and the end of February 2026 to submit your questions. We'll be back in April with the second part of the interview and Sarah will answer YOUR inquiries about pollinators, gardening with native plants, how-to advice, and any other burning curiosities about the role of pollinators in Newaygo County's ecosystems.

Submit Your Questions for Sarah

Volunteer Spotlight

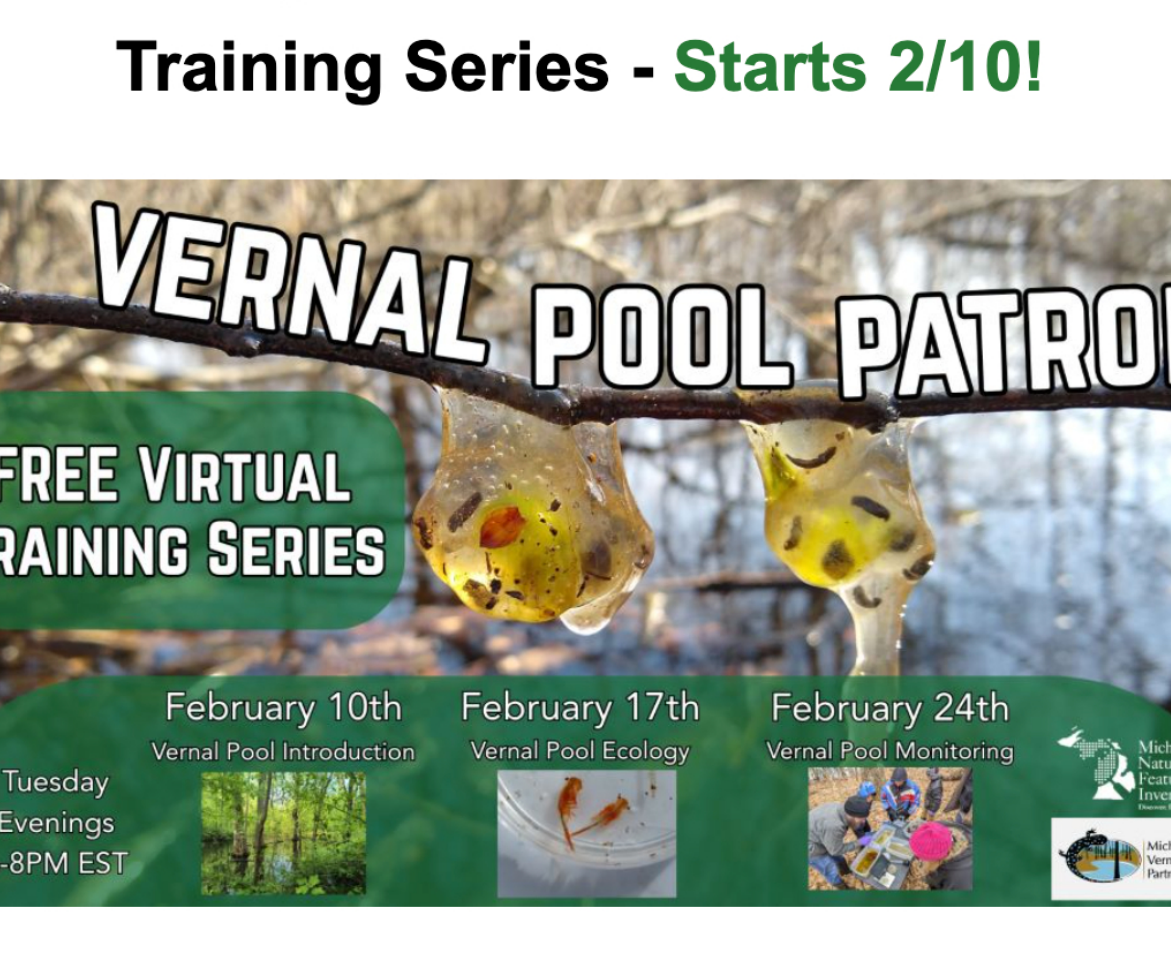
Tim Duffy: Champion of Vernal Pools and First Wood Frog Award Honoree

Tim Duffy of Newaygo, Michigan, has been honored as the first recipient of the Wood Frog Award by the Michigan Vernal Pool Patrol for his outstanding contributions to vernal pool conservation. The award ceremony took place on August 23, 2025, at the Kropscott Farm and Environmental Center during the MI Vernal Pool Patrol - Newaygo Region's Fall Training and Pool Party. Attendees enjoyed informative sessions on identifying fall vernal pools, shared stories, and explored the Kropscott woods to observe a dried vernal pool.

Tim's journey with vernal pools began when he attended an initial training session at Brooks Township Hall. This two-hour "book" training was a prerequisite for the hands-on field training. Tim, who was already familiar with the area's natural beauty through his volunteer work with the North Country Trail, was intrigued by the mysterious vernal pools and the distinctive calls of wood frogs and spring peepers.
Tim Duffy's dedication and adventurous spirit exemplify the essence of the Wood Frog Award, inspiring others to appreciate and protect these vital ecosystems.

Click to read entire Article

2026 Michigan Vernal Pool Patrol Virtual Training Series - Starts 2/10!


VERNAL POOL PATROL
FREE VIRTUAL TRAINING SERIES
Tuesday Evenings 6-8PM EST
February 10th
Vernal Pool Introduction
February 17th
Vernal Pool Ecology
February 24th
Vernal Pool Monitoring
Michigan Natural Features Inventory
Michigan Vernal Pools Partnership

Learn more about vernal pools and how you can help monitor and protect these fascinating and important wetlands across Michigan! This virtual training will provide information and resources to those interested in participating in the Michigan Vernal Pool Patrol or just interested in learning more about these important wetlands. The training will consist of three sessions presented on Tuesday evenings, February 10, 17, and 24 from 6:00-8:00 pm EST. If you are interested in participating in the Vernal Pool Patrol, please plan on attending ALL three sessions.

Register for the Training Series Here to Join the Michigan Vernal Pool Patrol!

What Else Can I Do?

1. **Share our website, posts, and E-news with Newaygo Community members and Organizations.**
2. **Join a Team! NCEC has teams about invasive species, native landscapes, ad restoration opportunities. More info on our website.**
3. **Bring your skills and knowledge to NCEC. Contact us if you have ideas of skills or offerings you'd like to bring to our community in partnership with NCEC.**
4. **If you work with another local organization doing similar work to protect our environment, your organization can become an NCEC Ally. It's free, and your organization can apply here.**
5. **Click here to Donate!**

Your Support Makes A Difference

NCEC is a small but mighty 501c3 non-profit organization! We depend on your tax deductible donations to continue our work, and to help us grow with our Newaygo County Environment needs.

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