



## Your Summer Report

# You're the monarch's best defense

By Steve Blackledge, senior director of our national network's Conservation America campaign

After 10 long days in a chrysalis, monarch butterflies break free, ready to spread their wings and take their first triumphant flight. But the world they fly into is increasingly toxic and unwelcoming.

Lately, fewer and fewer monarch caterpillars are making it to their first flight. I want you to meet the monarchs that you, as an Environment Virginia member, are helping to save:

Monarchs are the only butterflies known to make a two-way migration. When days start to get colder and shorter, the ever-perceptive monarchs know it's time to pack up and head south.

Western monarchs, unlike their eastern siblings, are the sprinters of the family. Flying faster for shorter distances, these monarchs leave their inland homes to spend their winters in the moderate Mexican and Californian climates.

Along the way, these butterflies flutter from flower to flower, collecting nectar and pollinating our plants. And they even run into some familiar faces: eastern monarchs.

When winter approaches, eastern monarch butterflies hit the road, too. But these butterflies travel a little differently than their sprinter siblings.

Eastern monarchs are marathoners. Flying slower, for longer distances, these 3-inch butterflies make the 3,000-mile migration from as far as Maine all the way to Mexico.

And when they meet up with some western monarchs on their way to their winter homes, they put their differences aside and form "roosts." These roosts, or clusters of monarchs, stick together



*In just 40 years, America has lost 80% of eastern monarch butterflies, and more than 95% of western monarchs (pictured above).*

er throughout the winter. Together, the butterflies stay close to each other to retain warmth, resting on hillsides and treetops.

Once winter ends, the fun is over. The monarch siblings head back to their separate summer homes and breeding grounds where they can try to bring a new generation of monarchs into the world.

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Thanks  
for making it  
all possible

## 85 groups urge Biden administration: Let trees grow

One climate solution requires no human effort: Letting mature and old-growth trees grow.

On Feb. 15, Environment Virginia Research & Policy Center, Environment America Research & Policy Center, and a coalition of more than 85 groups launched the Climate Forests Campaign, which is calling on the Biden administration to take executive action to protect mature trees and forests on federal

panels on the rooftops of big-box retail and grocery stores could generate enough electricity to power nearly 8 million homes. That much solar power would cut global warming pollution by the equivalent of taking 11.3 million cars off the road. The report also identifies companies—Walmart, Target, The Home Depot—with vast solar potential and recommends ways to harness that potential.

“If we want a clean energy future, we should deploy rooftop solar everywhere we can,” said Susan Rakov, managing director of Frontier Group. “Big-box store rooftops are right in the middle of most American communities, and they’re big, flat and panel-ready.”

Supporters of Environment Virginia and our national network have submitted 14,000 petition signatures urging Walmart to go solar.

## Did you know? Infrastructure bill included good news for wildlife

As butterflies, grizzly bears and more prepared for winter, Congress voted on legislation that could make their survival easier this summer.

On Nov. 5, the U.S. House of Representatives passed the \$1.2 trillion bipartisan infrastructure act. The act, with billions for roads and railways, also invests in wildlife. The act includes \$350 million for wildlife corridors, which grant animals safe passage around roads and development, as well as millions more to create monarch habitats along highways and revegetate areas depleted by invasive species.

“From pollinators to panthers, our wildlife are facing an imperiled future due to decades of disappearing habitat and a changing climate,” said Steve Blackledge, senior director of our national Conservation America campaign. “The infrastructure act makes important progress toward solving these problems.”

Environment Virginia also supported clean energy, electric vehicle, clean water and other provisions in the infrastructure act.



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Carbon-absorbing older forests are also the best habitat for thousands of species of wildlife, including spotted owls, red-cockaded woodpeckers and pine martens.

lands from logging. Forests—particularly older forests—store vast amounts of carbon and continue absorbing carbon as they age. Carbon-absorbing older forests are also the best habitat for thousands of species of wildlife, including spotted owls, red-cockaded woodpeckers and pine martens.

“We often call it the climate solution you don’t have to invent,” Ellen Montgomery, public lands campaign director for our national network, told The Washington Post. “Trees are literally standing right there in front of us.”

And this past Earth Day, President Biden took the first step. He ordered federal agencies to conduct an inventory of old-growth forests on federal lands so that policies can be adopted to protect them.

## ‘Big, flat and panel-ready’: Report identifies vast solar potential on superstore rooftops

Big roofs mean big potential for clean energy, and we’ve got the research to prove it.

According to “Solar on Superstores,” a report released on Jan. 20 by our research partners at Environment America Research & Policy Center and Frontier Group, installing solar



### Toward a greener future

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For more information call 1-800-841-7299 or send an email to: [PlannedGiving@EnvironmentVirginia.org](mailto:PlannedGiving@EnvironmentVirginia.org)

Get more updates on our work online at <https://environmentvirginia.org>.



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## You're the monarch's best defense

*Decades ago, millions of western monarch butterflies graced our skies. Today, fewer than 250,000 remain.*

Despite their differences, these butterflies have a lot in common. They both rely on the milkweed plant for food as caterpillars. Their bright orange wings are their natural defense mechanism, serving as a warning to would-be predators that they're poisonous. But even with their defenses, both are fluttering toward extinction.

In the last few decades, monarch populations have seen devastating losses: Western monarch winter populations dropped by more than 95%.

Their siblings have suffered similar losses: The eastern monarch population has decreased by 80%. Together, more than 8 out of every 10 monarchs have disappeared.

Milkweed, monarchs' main food source, has vanished before their eyes: At least 1.3 billion milkweed stems have disappeared, leaving monarch caterpillars weak and hungry.

Monarchs don't stand a chance if pesticides continue to kill off milkweed. But thankfully, monarchs' wings aren't their only defense mechanism.

Monarchs have you. We're calling on U.S. Interior Secretary Deb Haaland to give monarchs emergency Endangered Species Act protections. The act, which has a 99% success rate at saving species, could bring monarchs back from the brink of extinction.

But if they're going to receive them, we'll need as many voices as we can get to convince Secretary Haaland to tip the scales in favor of saving monarchs. If you haven't already, you can call on Secretary Haaland to use her emergency powers to save the monarchs by going to this link and adding your name: [environmentvirginia.org/monarchs](https://environmentvirginia.org/monarchs).

*Over this past year, hundreds of canvassers have helped win grassroots support for pollinators.*



Staff



Thanks to your support, we've made some real progress this spring for our environment. In this issue, you'll read about the critical causes you've advanced, from protecting pollinators to paving the way to a greener future. Thanks for making it all possible.

Elly Boehmer  
State Director



Environment Virginia is part of The Public Interest Network, which is celebrating 50 years of action for a change. The Public Interest Network operates and supports organizations committed to a shared vision of a better world and a strategic approach to social change.



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## Your Summer 2022 Report

### Our mission:

We all want clean air, clean water and open spaces. But it takes independent research and tough-minded advocacy to win concrete results for our environment, especially when powerful interests stand in the way of environmental progress.

That's the idea behind Environment Virginia, Inc., a project of Environment America, Inc. We focus on protecting Virginia's air, water and open spaces. We speak out and take action at the local, state and national levels to improve the quality of our environment and our lives.

## We're urging legislators to put wildlife over waste here in Virginia

In 2021, our members and staff helped ban single-use polystyrene foam containers across Virginia. Now we're turning to the next chapter in our Wildlife Over Waste campaign.

This summer, Environment Virginia staff are going door to door to build support for tackling plastic packaging pollution at its source—by making companies pay for the plastic waste they create and giving them incentives to reduce unnecessary plastics.

Our canvassers are educating the public on the issue and asking our members and others to urge their legislators to support a plastics producer responsibility bill.

"Using something for five minutes when it will pollute our planet for hundreds of years is antithetical to stewardship and conservation," said Elly Boehmer, state director of Environment Virginia. "This law to reduce plastic waste is an important step toward ensuring the long-term protection of our state's natural heritage."

Passing a producer responsibility bill here in Virginia would make companies financially responsible for the harmful plastic waste they produce and help us put wildlife over waste.

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*We can't recycle our way out of this mess—of all the plastic ever made, only 9% has been recycled. Instead, we need to reduce the amount of plastic pollution we produce.*



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