

# Minneapolis neighborhood seeks wildlife habitat status: 'It's a labor of love'

Longfellow in east Minneapolis aims to be Minnesota's first Certified Wildlife Community.

By **Mary Jane Smetanka** Special to the Star Tribune | JULY 29, 2019 — 2:08PM

At Minneapolis' eastern edge, the greater Longfellow community is rich in nature, with nesting bald eagles, the Mississippi River, Minnehaha Park, foxes and wild turkeys. Minnesota's new official bee, the endangered rusty patched bumblebee, has been spotted there.

But when Longfellow resident Dan Schultz took classes to become a Minnesota Master Naturalist, he realized that the neighborhood's green aura was an illusion. Plants that native butterflies, moths and other insects depend on to survive were disappearing, and invasive and nonnative plants were taking over.

"When I learned about buckthorn, I realized we're in trouble," he said. "It seems like we're in this natural wonderland, but our natural areas are not in the state they were in before."

Schultz, along with the Longfellow Community Council and the National Wildlife Federation, are leading a volunteer effort to have the greater Longfellow area become the first in Minnesota to be a Certified Wildlife Community. The effort, begun in 2016, aims to have 150 private yards, four schools and four common areas, such as churches and business properties, earn wildlife habitat status.

The greater Longfellow area is bordered by the Midtown Greenway on the north, the river on the east, Minnehaha Park on the south and the Hiawatha Light Rail Line on the west. So far, three schools, three common areas and about 55 yards have been certified, Schultz said. That means those properties have the characteristics to support wildlife, defined as having food, water, cover and places to raise young. They also should use sustainable practices, including avoiding pesticides, removing invasive species and planting native plants.

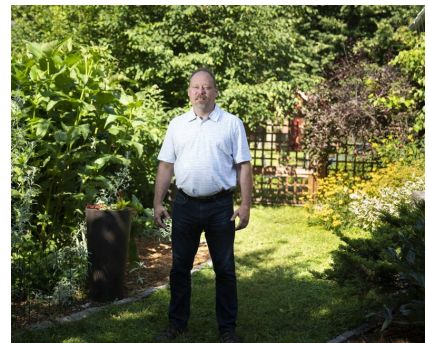
"This does not take a lot of money," Schultz said. "It's a labor of love. It just takes effort."

Schultz's passion for the project was fueled after he heard author and University of Delaware Prof. Douglas Tallamy speak about how restoring natural areas in the U.S. is not enough to slow ecological decline. Because about 85 percent of the nation's property is privately owned, Tallamy says, people must add native plants to their yards to help sustain native birds and insects. And with much of the U.S. now urbanized, cities and suburbs are key to wildlife survival.

"The point is, our natural areas can't do it anymore," Schultz said. "The focus of this program is on privately owned land. We've got to bring it home, in our own yards. That can make a huge difference."

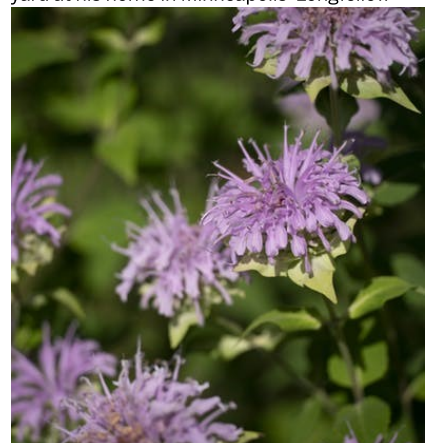
Schultz hopes to reach out to businesses in the area soon, but the project's emphasis so far has been on working with people on their residential properties. Last year the project added six mentors to help people with their yards. Usually they were homeowners who were new to the neighborhood or who were nervous about tearing up their yards.

"Talking to people and seeing them work on their yards is fantastic," Schultz said.



PHOTOS BY RENÉE JONES SCHNEIDER •  
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Dan Schultz has created a wildlife habitat in his yard at his home in Minneapolis' Longfellow



Bee Balm in Dan Schultz's wildlife habitat in his yard at his home in Minneapolis, Minn. Friday, July 12, 2019. Schultz, along with the Longfellow

While planting to support native insects and wildlife can sound intimidating to new homeowners and rookie gardeners, small acts can have a big effect, Schultz said. Water, including birdbaths and especially a fountain or pool with moving water, is a magnet for wildlife. Planting one oak tree benefits hundreds of different insects and butterflies, as well as birds and other wildlife.

Then there is the remarkable cup plant (*silphium perfoliatum*), a towering perennial that Schultz calls “a habitat on a stick.” Cup plants can grow 8 feet tall, attract pollinators with their yellow flowers high in the air, and are a water source for birds because of pockets that hold water where the large leaves meet the stem. Baby hummingbirds have been known to feed off aphids that hide on the undersides of leaves. Late in summer, goldfinches and other birds mob the plants to eat the flowers and seed heads.

When Schultz bought his south Minneapolis house, it was mostly lawn and had gardens that included lots of phlox and lilies. While about half of his yard is still grass, he planted the rest in prairie and woodland plants, about 75 percent of them native.

He also created a rain garden to hold stormwater in his yard, and planted trees and shrubs to help moths and butterflies. They included a red oak and a birch, as well as berry producers like scarlet elderberry and American cranberry. A favorite plant in the yard is red-twig dogwood, with flowers that bumblebees love, berries that are quickly stripped by birds and bright red stems that pop out of the landscape in the gray days of winter.

“But the most fun I had was making a little pond with a solar pump that keeps the water moving,” he said. “The birds seem to like that better.”

Once people have the four wildlife elements in their yard, they can certify their property by paying \$20 to register it with the National Wildlife Federation ([nwf.org/Garden-for-Wildlife/Certify](https://www.nwf.org/Garden-for-Wildlife/Certify) (<https://www.nwf.org/Garden-for-Wildlife/Certify>)).

While the surface reward is confirmation that a homeowner’s yard has become more sustainable — “People like a pat on the back,” Schultz said — the real reward is the feeling that the community is doing something together to protect the rusty patched bumblebee and other species that lived in Longfellow long before bungalows lined the streets.

“It’s about community, really, bringing people together in a very unique way,” Schultz said. “Every time I meet people in their yard, it feels like we’re part of something together, and it’s great.

“The thing about all of this is, it’s just so much fun. You see so many butterflies and birds. If everyone just does a little bit, we could have scarlet tanagers and even fireflies in our yards.”

More information on the project is at [longfellowwildlife.blogspot.com](https://longfellowwildlife.blogspot.com/) (<https://longfellowwildlife.blogspot.com/>).

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