

**T**he National Wildlife Federation (NWF) has selected the Greater Longfellow area of Minneapolis as the first in Minnesota to be a certified Community Wildlife Habitat through its Garden for Wildlife program. The designation is the culmination of a five-year volunteer effort among local neighbors, schools, churches and businesses to add wildlife habitat to urban yards and other spaces.

Longfellow team leader Daniel Schultz said the certification shows what people can accomplish working together. What started as Schultz sharing ideas with a neighbor years ago grew into a plan that was backed by the Longfellow Community Council and now the NWF, which made the certification official on August 10.



Carrie

Magnuson and Daniel Schultz hold a sign recognizing Howe Elementary's commitment to providing a place for students to connect with nature. Schools and businesses joined dozens of home gardeners to help the Greater Longfellow area become a Community Wildlife Habitat. Photos by Brad Stauffer

"We're very proud of it," said Ian Young, chair of the community council's Environment & River Gorge Committee. "This comes after a lot of years of hard work."

Schultz noted that the last year or so has been trying for many people, first with the COVID-19 virus and then with the riots and civil unrest. He said the wildlife habitat endeavor provided a positive outlet during a period that was sorely in need of it.

"It's been an emotional time for so many," Schultz said. "People have said that it's this effort that's gotten them through these rough times. It's all about neighbors helping neighbors."

The Greater Longfellow area, which includes the neighborhoods of Hiawatha, Howe, Longfellow and Cooper, more than exceeded the NWF's requirements. The area now has 173 certified properties (150 were required). The list also includes five schools and six common areas of businesses and churches, both of which exceeded the number needed.



Pumpkins hang

from vines at Howe Elementary School's raised garden beds.

The idea behind the certification is get more people to improve their landscapes to attract more butterflies, bees, birds and other wildlife, and to increase the supply of native perennials, shrubs and trees. The end result, Schultz said, is to have healthier soil, air and water.

The certification means that the designated gardens are verified as environmental-friendly places that support urban wildlife. The components to certification are food (such as seeds, nectar, fruit or sap), water (such as a birdbath or pond), cover (protection from weather and predators) and places to raise young wildlife (such as burrows, dead trees or wetland).

Gardeners also are being encouraged to avoid pesticides, use native plants that attract bees, and create a wide variety of habitat to attract migratory fowl. Gardeners who meet the criteria can certify their property with a \$20 donation to the NWF. They can also purchase a lawn sign that proclaims the property as certified.

Schultz said the area's efforts are already paying off for the rusty-patched bumblebee, which was named Minnesota's state bee in 2019 and is on the federal endangered list. Cultivation of milkweed and blazing star plants, which attract bees, are also being encouraged.

Kevin Oldenburg, principal of the Howe and Hiawatha campuses of Hiawatha Community School, two certified schoolyard habitats, is a big fan of the wildlife program. "We're excited," he said. "I can't say enough about the job our garden team has done the last couple of years."

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Oldenburg spoke from the garden at Howe that features a mix of flowers and vegetables—everything from sunflowers to tomatoes and pumpkins. He said it feels especially gratifying when local residents pass by and compliment the school garden. “We’ve had a lot of support for this garden from our community,” he said.

The Longfellow area’s other certified schools are Anishinabe Academy, Michael Dowling and Sanford Middle. The common areas are Epworth United Methodist Church, Belle’s Toolbox, El Norteño, Sigma 7, Minnehaha Professional Building and Holy Trinity Church.

Cate Cooney, who moved to Longfellow a few years ago, said the program can sometimes be a tough sell at first, because it takes up lawn space. However, she said creation of wildlife habitat can also bring a sense of achievement.

“You just try to do what’s beneficial for our ecosystem,” Cooney said. Besides, she quipped, “I don’t like to mow.”

For more information about the project, visit [longfellowwildlife.blogspot.com](http://longfellowwildlife.blogspot.com).

— *Bill Wagner*