

# Partnerships for Pollinators and Power

By **Victoria Wojcik**, *Pollinator Partnership*

**T**he Sacramento Municipal Utility District (SMUD) has partnered with the Pollinator Partnership (P2), a San Francisco, California, U.S.-based non-profit (501c3) working toward pollinator conservation to develop a holistic management plan for the utility rights-of-way (ROW) spanning the American River Parkway Recreational Area in Sacramento County. This project goes beyond collaborative land management to include a first-of-its-kind landscape initiative in California and a scientific test of the benefits of alternative ROW management techniques on pollinators.

Thoughtfully designed and executed integrated vegetation management programs can maintain healthy urban forests, ensure safe and reliable utility transmission, and enhance habitat opportunities for pollinating species, working in synergy to achieve multiple organizational and project-based goals in a single initiative. Many birds, bees, bats, butterflies and beetles facilitate reproduction in plants by the act of pollination. These species are an essential element of all ecosystems supporting food production and ecosystem stability.

SMUD's utility holdings are situated near the highly productive agricultural region of California's Central Valley. The millions of acres running underneath transmission corridors are potential pollinator habitats. The needs of pollinating species (herbaceous early successional habitat) are also the ideal management conditions for utilities. There is added pressure that makes pollinator landscape management the logical choice: the North American Elec-

tric Reliability Corp.'s guidelines and penalties. The practices and principals of integrated vegetation management, however, can support the development of habitat sites that promote pollinators.

The combined knowledge base of P2 on pollinator habitat development and SMUD's certified arborist vegetation management services department is creating a publicly accessible landscape that showcases how partnerships can be used to achieve diverse goals.

The planned maintenance on the American River Parkway SMUD utility corridor will take the form of tree removal within the transmission zone combined with facilitating the growth and development of pollinator attractive plant species. Establishing annual and perennial herbs in the transmission zone will reduce or exclude taller hazard species while providing a site for pollinators to feed. Border vegetation will be maintained to add structure, another important element of pollinator habitat that fits into utility tree management practices within transmission corridors. In addition, this project contains a unique element of habitat development that has yet to be formally tested: the provision of additional nesting sites by modifying standing snags that result from tree topping or removal and through adding nest boxes.

Pollinator-conscious ROW management projects have been demonstrated in the East, but none have been developed or are under development in the West. High visibility and high public traffic in this region support outreach and education, and will allow members of the local public to interact with managed urban forest landscapes.

The American River Parkway receives more visitors annually than Yosemite National Park. It runs the length of urban and suburban neighborhoods and includes multiple land uses for recreation. The accessibility of this site also presents an outstanding public outreach opportunity — open house events, educational/information kiosk development, electronic media — that is integrated into this program design.

Sacramento County Parks is also working closely with SMUD and P2 to develop a trilateral partnership for landscape management, pollinator conservation, and the conservation of native plant and animal species within the parkway.

The management of landscapes within the public realm presents challenges that include developing trust and relationships with diverse stakeholders; providing a service to stakehold-



Low-growing and early successional herbaceous species produce a diverse landscape under utility lines and attract important native pollinators, such as bumble bees. Photos by R. Johnstone (landscape) and S. Buchmann (inset).

ers that is consistent, efficient and meets their expectations; and working within multiple levels of regulation and jurisdictions. However, challenging and complex projects with defined boundaries and limitations spur creativity and advancements.

The goal for this project is to think outside of the utility management box, working to create an ecological and socially beneficial program. Conservation-based partnerships enhance the image of utility- and tree-management programs that often suffer from poor public opinion when there is a lack of basic public knowledge.

At the American River site, the partners have outlined specific project goals they hope to achieve:

- Create a safer utility transmission corridor that will guarantee services for the local community.
- Reduce the need for continued, expensive and disruptive tree maintenance.
- Develop habitat that will attract important pollinator species.
- Develop and document a pollinator-specific integrated vegetation management program.

The overall goal is to inspire other local partnerships where professional and institutional forest management programs and organizations can work with local groups to achieve parallel goals with project initiatives.

SMUD and P2 aim to achieve the basic goals of safe util-

ity management with style, enlisting the participation of expert partners and various stakeholders. Together, they also have a large education and outreach goal that is supported by the proximity of their project site to high-density populations and the heavy usage of the recreational facilities within the American River Parkway. The partners believe that this project presents more opportunities than challenges and will provide essential information and guidelines for other utility-management initiatives across the country in similar sensitive areas.

SMUD and P2 are committed to the development and longevity of this project. Both organizations have long histories working successfully with other partners. Many other stakeholders have vested interests in this project work, including other nonprofits acting within the region, local extension offices, college and professional training programs, and the local community. **TDW**

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