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## Plant.Grow.Fly. and Mayor Cownie Encourage Iowa's Mayors to Sign Monarch Pledge

**DES MOINES, Iowa** (March 23, 2016) – Des Moines' Mayor, Frank Cownie, became the first mayor in Iowa to take the National Wildlife Federation's Mayors' Monarch Pledge.

“The City of Des Moines is excited to partner with Iowa communities to fight to save the monarch species as their population has declined more than 90 percent in the past twenty years. Monarchs are one of many species in decline and we can work together to prevent this. As Iowa's capital city and first to sign the pledge, we welcome other Iowa mayors to join the fight for our planet. Sign the pledge today!” said Cownie.

With the help of Blank Park Zoo's Plant.Grow.Fly. program, Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge, Des Moines Parks and Recreation, and many other partners, the City of Des Moines will implement actions over the next year that will support the recovery of the monarch butterfly. Activities will include efforts to encourage citizens and communities to plant milkweed, the host plant of the monarch butterfly.

“Plant.Grow.Fly. and our partners are working collaboratively to increase habitat for pollinators, like the iconic monarch butterfly. Saving this important pollinator will take a true community effort and we encourage every mayor in Iowa to sign this pledge and take actions in their own communities to aid in this fight,” said Jessie Lowry, conservation manager, Blank Park Zoo.

Lowry said that she wants people to encourage their mayor to take the Mayor's Monarch Pledge pledge at [www.nwf.org/mayorsmonarchpledge](http://www.nwf.org/mayorsmonarchpledge).

Mayors all over the United States are taking the Mayors' Monarch Pledge and Des Moines is the 78<sup>th</sup> city to sign up. Mayor Cownie, Plant.Grow.Fly. and other partners throughout the Midwest are encouraging mayors to sign the pledge.

### The Mayors' Monarch Pledge

The monarch butterfly is an iconic North American species whose multigenerational migration and metamorphosis from caterpillar to butterfly has captured the imagination of millions of Americans. We, the undersigned Mayors and local government chief executives, are deeply concerned about the decline of the monarch butterfly population.

Twenty years ago, more than one billion Eastern monarch butterflies migrated to Mexico. In the winter of 2014, only 60 million made the trip. The North American monarch population has declined by more than 90 percent in the past two decades. Monarch scientists attribute the decline to degradation and loss of summer breeding habitat in the U.S., and loss of winter habitat in Mexico. Western populations of monarch butterflies that overwinter in California are also in decline. Cities, towns and counties have a critical role to play to help save the monarch butterfly. Municipalities in particular can provide habitat at public parks, median strips, community gardens and municipal buildings that serve as community hubs such as recreation centers and libraries. Schools, homes and businesses can all provide essential habitat for monarchs too. Simple changes in landscaping ordinances or school policies can make a big difference for the monarch. Educating citizens about how and where to grow milkweed is also a key piece of the puzzle. Creating habitat and educating citizens will benefit other pollinators that need healthy habitat as well. When Mayors speak up and take a stand, citizens notice. Therefore, we hereby commit to help restore habitat for the monarch and encourage our citizens to do the same, so that these magnificent butterflies will once again flourish across the continent.

### ***About Plant.Grow.Fly.***

Blank Park Zoo's Plant.Grow.Fly. is a collaboration of almost 50 local, regional and national partners committed to save native pollinators, like butterflies and bees. Plant.Grow.Fly. encourages the planting of butterfly gardens to increase habitat for pollinators. To date, over 500 gardens have been registered with the project.

#### *About Blank Park Zoo*

*Blank Park Zoo, Iowa's WILDEST Adventure, is open 10 a.m. – 4 p.m. seven days a week through April. Beginning May 1, Blank Park Zoo's summer hours will be 9 a.m. – 5 p.m. Admission rates are \$13 for an adult, \$8 for a child (3-12 years), and \$11 for a senior. Children two years and under and Blank Park Zoo members are free. The Zoo is located at 7401 SW 9th St., Des Moines, IA 50315. Visit the Zoo online at <http://www.blankparkzoo.com>. The Zoo is an accredited member of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) The AZA is America's leading accrediting organization that sets rigorous, professional standards for zoos and aquariums. The AZA is building North America's largest wildlife conservation movement by engaging and inspiring the 143 million annual visitors to its member institutions and their communities to care about and take action to help protect wildlife.*