

Forage and Grasslands as Pollinator Habitat in North Dakota

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The northern Great Plains has significant amounts of perennial grassland, which in addition to supporting livestock, provides critical habitat to both native and domestic pollinators.

According to large scale analyses, crop diversity in the northern Great Plains has increased during the past 35 years. The increase in crop diversity, however, has been accompanied by a significant change in land use from perennial crops to annual crops. Thus, it is important to understand immediate land use around bee yards (apiaries) to accurately gauge potential pollinator resources.

In 2014 and 2015 the land use around 320 bee yards in North Dakota was documented in roadside surveys and site visits.

The number of crops or land uses surrounding the bee yards ranged from 1 to 5 with hay crops the most common followed by wheat and pasture.

The reconnaissance of bee yards in 2014 and 2015 demonstrated that forage and grazingland in North Dakota provides an essential ecosystem service in providing landscapes that support diverse floral resources for both native pollinators and commercial apiaries.

Understanding the links among agroecosystem diversity, management intensity, land use, and pollinators will enable better decisions to be made on where pollinator habitat is best enhanced on the landscape and inform government programs designed to assist farmers with developing better habitat.