2019 EPRI Pollinator Workshop:

Intersection of Human Wellbeing, Pollinators, and Power Companies

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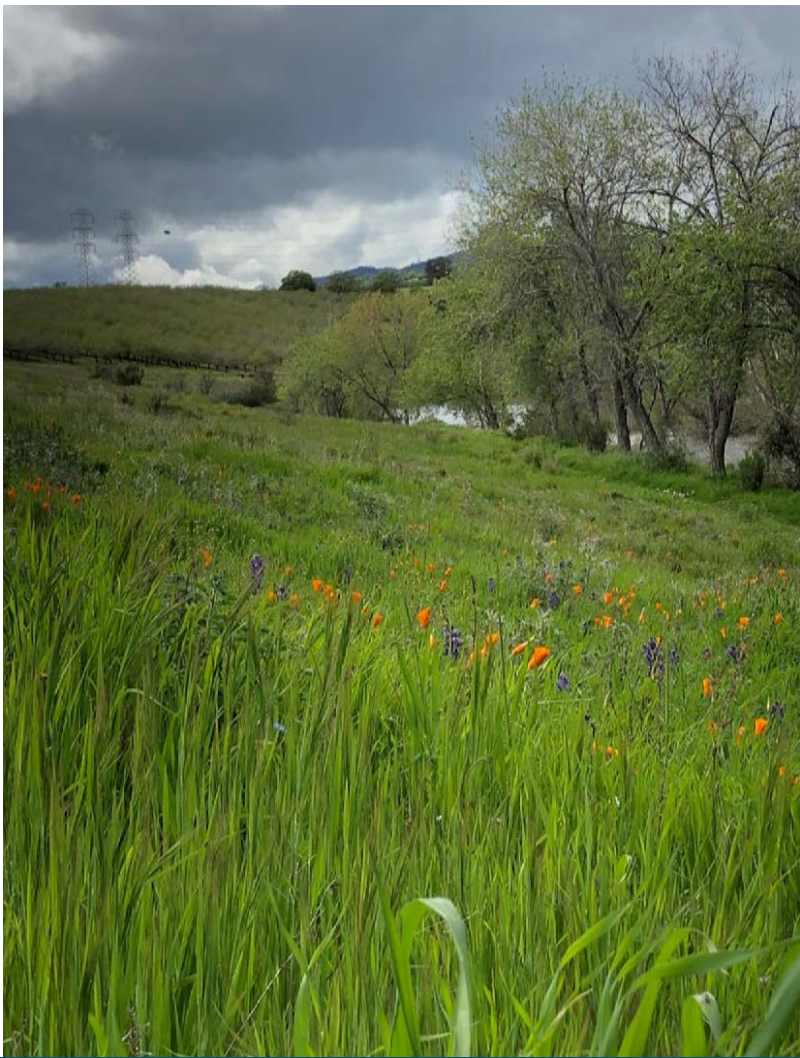
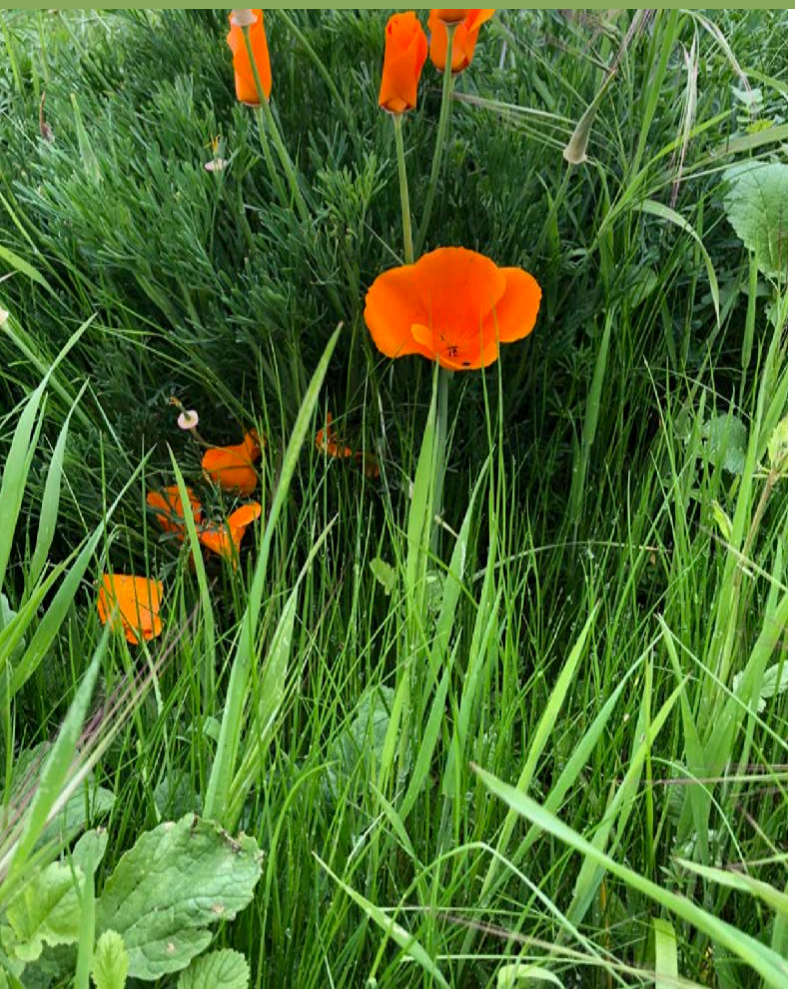
I recently attended the **Electric Power Research Institute (EPRI) Pollinator Workshop: Intersection of Human Wellbeing, Pollinators, and Power Companies**. As you might expect, this meeting was heavily attended by electric power companies, but it was also attended by researchers from universities and organizations such as the Xerces Society, Pollinator Partnership, and the Almond Board of California. EPRI also included a group of students that they collectively referred to throughout the conference as Generation Z. The workshop was broken into two days:

Day 1 - Field trip to the California central valley farm operations
Day 2 - Presentations and discussion

Overall the workshop content seemed to be focused mostly toward the importance of pollinators for the agricultural community, and therefore mankind. For instance, one-third of the average American diet includes food that requires pollination. The workshop created a greater appreciation for how critical pollinators are for the production of crops and therefore the survival of humans. Much of the agricultural community is focused on the conservation of the European honeybee (Apis mellifera) which is widely used to pollinate crops that produce nuts and fruits.

Additional research is being completed to study the importance of native bees to agricultural production because some plants (e.g. tomatoes) require bumblebees for pollination. In addition, wild bees provide additional pollination services during seasons and times of day that honeybees are not present. While this focus on the agricultural importance of pollinators may seem tangential to the interests of the utility community, **there are real opportunities here for utilities with land-scape scale vegetation management programs to implement corporate stewardship and sustainability efforts to provide meaningful benefits to pollinators, agricultural communities, and society at large.**





The Xerces Society played a major role in organizing the field trip and providing content during the workshop. The Society provides conservation efforts including **research, education, and actions to mitigate the risks to pollinators from habitat loss, pesticide exposure, climate change, and disease.** The Society currently offers a certification called Bee Better for sustainable agricultural practices that support pollinator conservation. The Xerces Society is considering providing a similar certification program for electric power companies.

EPRI and New York Power Authority (NYPA) are currently developing a geo-spatial tool that provides wild bee habitat assessments for prioritizing pollinator conservation efforts. This tool is using data from the Integrated Valuation of Ecosystem Services and Tradeoffs (InVEST) website which provides open-source models that map the value from nature, in this case wild bee habitat. Wild bee habitat can provide pollination services to the agricultural community over large distances (>4 miles). Electric power companies may want to use this tool to demonstrate the **value of the habitat** that they maintain for the surrounding communities. In addition, some electric power companies are also taking steps to protect and improve pollinator habitat within their managed lands to support their carbon sequestration efforts.

EPRI is currently working with NYPA to validate their wild bee habitat model through field data collection. Using this model, electric power companies can identify areas of importance on their properties or management responsibility for pollinator conservation. NYPA's long-term use of integrated vegetation management (IVM) is providing positive results that these methods can improve pollinator habitat while minimizing the cost to maintain rights-of-way (ROW).

During discussions with participants, several take-aways from the workshop became apparent to me and are summed up into four words that best describe what electric power companies should consider for their sustainability goals:

1. **Multi-generational** - elders have experience and younger generation eager with new ideas. The combination of these ideas and ambitions can improve the outcome of conservation.

2. **Patience**- culture change is slow for electric power companies to adjust their processes. A leader can take small steps forward and eventually momentum will build behind the efforts to grow into a team, and then full company participation and support.

3. **Value**- electric power companies are working hard for conservation efforts and should more proactively communicate the value they provide to the community through the many benefits their properties and land management provides beyond providing generation and delivery of electricity. The habitat that is maintained by electric power companies provides value-added benefits to the community in many different ways (e.g. pollination, recreation, climate change mitigation).

4. **Partnerships**- This was my primary takeaway. Partnerships are going to be critical for finding a solution to the conservation of pollinating species. Electric power companies can collaborate with the agricultural industry and local farmers to strengthen the conservation efforts for pollinators. Other partnerships can be with non-profits such as Xerces or research institutions.

EPRI Meeting was held in Sacramento, California March 27-28.

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