

Floor Statement-Senator Max Baucus

Mr. President I rise today to speak about S. 1496, the Pollinator Habitat Protection Act, which I introduced May 24th. Pulitzer Prize-winning insect biologist E.O. Wilson said the honeybee is nature's "workhorse — and we took it for granted." That statement sums up the state of the nation's honey bee.

Our nation's honey bees are being affected by a phenomenon named colony collapse disorder, and the symptoms are baffling. Since October 2006, 35 percent or more of the United States' population of the Western honey bee - billions of individual bees - simply flew from their hives and disappeared.

We don't know what's causing their disappearance. The honeybee is an active pollinator for both agriculture and native plants. It is used commercially to pollinate crops across the country, and some crops, like apples and almonds, will not produce fruit without the assistance of the honey bee. My home state of Montana is the country's 5th largest honey producing state. Without bees, Montana would not produce our famous huckleberries.

During busy years, a hive might make up to five cross-country trips, following the crop blooming cycles. Scientists are speculating that the bees are stressed from making cross-country journeys and are being attacked by viruses and parasites. Either way, this is an emergency situation, and we have to do something now.

That's why I am introducing the Pollinator Habitat Protection Act.

This bill is simple and it makes sense. It's the right thing to do.

Through the use of the existing conservation programs in the Farm Bill, agriculture producers would receive incentives to rebuild natural habitat with flowering plants to benefit pollinators such as honey bees. For example, instead of planting straight grass, a producer could plant clover, alfalfa, or other native flowering plants on land enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program.

Perhaps this bill's most attractive feature is that it does not cost additional money or create a new program. It simply requires existing conservation programs to acknowledge pollinator habitat as a conservation resource and rewards producers whose conservation practices are beneficial for pollinators.

When the budget is tight, it's better to improve existing programs rather than create new ones. This is a dramatic important improvement for our conservation programs.

Its not often we can protect our environment and increase producer's income at the same time. But that's exactly what this bill will do. This is one simple way to help out our honey bee population and give farmers another option to make money on their land.

As an honorary co-chair of the Pollinator Partnership, I am honored to introduce this legislation. I want to thank organizations like the Coevolution Institute who are doing the right thing, by bringing a diverse group of people together from across the country to address this challenging issue.

I urge my colleagues to support S. 1496 the Pollinator Habitat Protection Act. Thank-you.