



THE GARDEN CLUB *of* AMERICA

**The Garden Club of America
14 E. 60th St, 3rd Floor
New York, NY 01122**

June 10, 2022

Good afternoon. My name is Karen Gilhuly and I am the chair of the National Affairs and Legislation Committee of The Garden Club of America. The GCA is a 109 year old non-profit, non-partisan organization with 18,000 club members across the country. Our purpose is to “restore, improve and protect the quality of the environment”. Since our founding, we have been consistently engaged in speaking up on behalf of the life-sustaining importance of plants as part of a healthy, balanced ecosystem.

It is my pleasure to represent the GCA today to speak on behalf of *native plants* in particular and to encourage strong support of HR 1548, the Native Plant Species Pilot Program Act. Thank you to Chairman Grijalva and the committee for the invitation to join you and to Ranking Member Westerman, Chair Neguse and particularly Representatives Cartwright and Stefanik for their leadership on this bill. The GCA appreciates the ongoing collaboration we have with so many of our members of Congress in developing effective policy and legislation that protects our natural world.

Plants are the foundation of every ecosystem on earth. Our oceans and coasts support kelp, mangrove forests, salt marshes, and sea grasses which remove vast amounts of carbon from the atmosphere, stabilize our coastlines and mitigate climate impacts. Our forests are vital to life on Earth. They provide the timber for our homes, purify the air we breathe, filter the water we drink, prevent erosion, and act as an important buffer against climate change. Amber waves of grain feed livestock, and provide the daily bread for a hungry and growing population. All around the world, plants form the basis for life.

Plants protect our planet's natural resources. They sequester carbon and oxygenate the air we breathe. How good do you feel when you take a walk in the woods? That's our plant community doing their job. They clean our water by filtering rain and removing toxins. And their root systems help stabilize soil and control erosion, reduce runoff during heavy rains, filter water, protect our critical wetlands, and those root systems are super powerful carbon sequesters. Plants are very hard workers.

Native plants are a specific category of plant. They can be large canopy trees, understory trees, shrubs, perennials, vines or grasses. They are indigenous to an area with a unique growing habitat. They have evolved over thousands of years in a specific geographic region, alongside local flora and fauna, without the involvement of man, in sync with the wildlife, native bees and birds they support.

The introduction and widespread use of non-native plants, like the kind you can readily buy at your local nursery, has upset the balance of our planet's biodiversity. The complex relationship between native plants and the wildlife they support is extremely specialized and it cannot be substituted with exotic, non-native plants. A significant number of North American native species, including insects, caterpillars, birds, and other animals, are at risk of extinction because they cannot eat non-native plants yet that is increasingly all they can find. Native plants help support the critical pollinators who've evolved alongside them - the birds, bees, bats and butterfly populations who work very hard to keep the complex biodiversity of our ecosystems in balance. Lest you think these critters are simply appealing, please know that without them, over 80% of our food would disappear. No pollinators certainly means no flowers but it also means no apples or almonds or wheat or cucumbers or pumpkins, etc. Tough for us and tough for all the other creatures we share the earth with.

Native plants are extremely high performers - you get a lot of bang for your buck! They are more efficient and less costly options in the long run for several reasons:

Their seeds are readily available

When they're planted where they are locally adapted, they thrive and do not require the use of expensive fertilizers to boost them along.

Their plant chemistry already knows how to fight off the "bad bugs" and therefore they don't require pesticides or even herbicides to keep them healthy.

because these extra steps aren't needed, they demand less time on the part of our growers and tenders

Once they are established, most native plants are drought resistant use far less water than non-native or invasive plants - a critical point in our increasingly warm climate.

And like all plants they do the job of cleaning our air and water and sequestering carbon.

To help support wildlife, to protect the biodiversity of our ecosystems and to improve the health of our planet, we need to adopt policies that promote the use of native plants on public lands and

in our communities. They need to have varying bloom times and be of differing heights, shapes and colors to successfully do their job of supporting wildlife. What better partner in this work than the National Park System?

HR 1548 sets up a win-win situation in that by empowering our skilled and experienced park service employees to propagate the native plant material specific to their park's ecosystem, nurture those plants and maximize their success. Once it's been established just which particular varieties of native plants will thrive, they can be planted throughout the parks, launching a healing process that is critical to a thriving environment. The invaluable information gathered from the pilot programs established by this legislation can inform a government-wide approach to the use of native plant species. It is our great hope and expectation that as a result of HR 1548, we will see an enormous increase in native plant use across all our public lands.

It is for these reasons that the 18,000 members of The Garden Club of America from all across the country ask you to support HR 1548 and, by extension, to encourage the use of native plants wherever and whenever possible.

Thank you again for your commitment. I look forward to answering any questions and to being a resource for the committee as it moves forward with this visionary and important legislation.

Respectfully submitted,

Karen Gilhuly

Enclosures:

Committee Witness Requirements

"Truth in Testimony" Witness Disclosure Form

Résumé

GCA Native Plant Position Paper