

House Natural Resources Committee
Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and Wildlife
Member Testimony – Representative Jimmy Panetta (CA-20)

Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Bentz, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for holding this important hearing today, and for giving me the opportunity to deliver testimony in support of my legislation: the bipartisan Monarch Action, Recovery, and Conservation of Habitat Act, or MONARCH Act for short.

I also want to recognize Dr. Erika Zavaleta, Professor of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology at the University of California, Santa Cruz, in my district and thank her and all of our panelists for taking the time to share their expertise with us today.

I come from the central coast of California, and in addition to representing UCSC and Santa Cruz County, I represent Pacific Grove, known as Butterfly City, USA, along with four of the top 10 high priority sites where monarch butterflies overwinter during their incredible 3,000-mile annual migration.

Sadly, I was recently in Pacific Grove at the Monarch Butterfly Sanctuary at a time where there should have been tens of thousands of monarch butterflies, but I didn't see a single one.

This is reflective of a larger, concerning trend. This past year, fewer than 2,000 monarch butterflies returned to their wintering grounds in coastal California, compared to just twenty years ago when millions of monarchs returned every winter.

These numbers reflect a staggering reality: the western monarch butterfly population has declined by more than 99 percent since the 1980s, and the numbers are continuing to decline.

What we are seeing is the product of climate change and the destruction of key habitat, which means that our butterflies are now unable to make their trek early enough before the cold snaps come, or they are forced to fly farther, without enough places to rest.

This population is now officially at imminent risk of extinction. Quite simply, if we don't act now, it will be too late.

But it's not all doom and gloom. We can still reverse course on this decline and save the western monarch butterfly and preserve its important role in our ecosystems and our history and culture.

That's why I have introduced MONARCH Act legislation that will help meet the critical need for urgent species recovery efforts by creating a Western Monarch Butterfly Rescue Fund directing key federal resources to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and authorizing \$125 million for critical activities to revive western monarch habitats like planting native milkweed and nectar species.

By providing grants to local experts for western monarch conservation projects the MONARCH Act will ensure that the people who are most knowledgeable about the western monarch are spearheading the efforts to save this very important piece of our ecosystem.

I would also be remiss if I didn't take this opportunity today to call on Secretary Haaland and the Department of Interior to use the emergency authority under the Endangered Species Act to finally list the monarch butterfly and open up additional, necessary resources.

Emergency protections can go into effect immediately, so that the western monarchs have the greatest chance of surviving this summer and the population can start to rebuild.

We must pursue every action available to us, including the actions outlined in my MONARCH Act, including actions made possible by an ESA listing, and including the continued work of our citizen scientists, and everyone who has taken an interest and dedicated their time and energy to learning about the western monarch and helping rebuild its habitat.

Taking a step back, we must also think about what the decline of the western monarch butterfly means for all of our pollinators.

If monarchs are in trouble because they don't have enough habitat, that means many of our other pollinators and wildlife that share that habitat are in trouble as well.

Monarch butterflies are the proverbial "canary in the coal mine" for pollinators. So, if we don't take action now to save our butterflies, we are setting ourselves up for a full-scale ecosystem collapse that will impact not just our environment but also our food supply and food security.

We can save the monarch butterflies, and we can start by passing the MONARCH Act.

In doing so, we can afford those who come after us the opportunity to celebrate and benefit from these butterflies' spectacular beauty, special migration, and profound role in our ecosystems.