

*This is part two of a series of articles that inform the public of an ambitious project that will benefit our local communities in many ways. Claverack Rural Electric Cooperative has undertaken a lawn-to-native pollinator habitat transition project on the grounds of their headquarters building, located along Route 6 in Wysox, Pennsylvania. Expected benefits include improved environmental stewardship, evaluating new right-of-way management strategies, educational opportunities for local students and groups, and reduced maintenance costs. Claverack is a rural electric cooperative that is owned by the members we serve.*

## The Power and Process of Planning

Businessman Nido Qubein said, “The trouble with many plans is that they are based on the way things are now. To be successful, your plan must focus on what you want, not what you have.”

At Claverack, we recognized if we wanted to have a successful native pollinator habitat project, we would need help and a good plan. I mentioned before that Bedford County residents Mike and Laura Jackson had been successful with projects like this, so I reached out to Laura and followed her advice.

We identified an area in the section of lawn to the west of our headquarters building that would work best for our project. We considered a lot of things like the natural slope of the land, visibility, aesthetics, signage, and site access for students and groups.

We envisioned different seed mixes for the different plots on the site. We wanted to attract a variety of pollinators and have a beautiful field of native plants and flowers that bloom throughout the growing season.

I then took soil samples of the area. The site had both wet and dry areas, and the soil samples helped determine which plant species should be chosen for each area. Laura helped me interpret the soil analysis and choose appropriate seeds. Ernst Seeds in Meadville, Pennsylvania, was able to provide professional consultation and process our seed order.

We also considered timing. This is an agricultural endeavor, and much like a farmer planting a crop, we had to do some work up front. Established grasses and plants that will compete with the new seed beds need to be eliminated.

I spent my early years on a dairy farm, and the way we traditionally planted a new crop was to bottom plow the ground, use a disc to cut up the soil, use a drag to smooth the field and then pick rock. And then pick more and more rock. Eventually, we planted the crop, but there was always risk of erosion of our good topsoil from wind and rain.

Given the fact that we want to use best management practices in establishing our plots and the fact that I hate to pick rock - we chose a different approach. In June we sprayed herbicide to prepare the selected areas, and we will use a no-till planter to drill the seed right into the ground this fall.

To ensure we did our spraying safely responsibly, I asked Certified Wildlife Biologist Jason Diaferio from the Natural Resource Conservation Service/Pheasants Forever to be involved when we sprayed. Jason and I followed the product directions for application to include mix rates and ground speeds to ensure the product worked as designed. We also planned all applications within proper timeframes to use the least amount of herbicide to achieve our desired results. When properly applied in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions, herbicides are safe and effective.

This fall, we'll use a no-till drill to plant our selected seed mixes into the designed plots. Next spring, we'll have some flowering pollinator plant species, and the site will continue to develop and mature over several years.

If you have driven by recently, you have noticed our brown lawn.

Don't worry, we have a plan.