This is part four 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.

What is a Pollinator?

The Claverack lawn-to-native pollinator habitat transition project is beneficial for several reasons, but it's probably most beneficial to pollinators.

In a food chain, plants are called producers. To grow, they use nutrients from the soil, energy from the sun, carbon dioxide from the air, and water. Primary consumers like insects use plants for food. Secondary consumers like frogs and birds often eat the insects, and they get eaten by other consumers. A food chain is cyclical, and as final consumers die and decompose, soil is improved and the plants benefit. Pollinating insects and birds are critical to this cycle.

According to the National Park Service: "A pollinator is anything that helps carry pollen from the male part of the flower (stamen) to the female part of the same or another flower (stigma). The movement of pollen must occur for the plant to become fertilized and produce fruits, seeds, and young plants."

Many plant species rely on pollinators to produce fruits and seeds. Bees, flies, beetles, wasps, moths, butterflies and hummingbirds are common pollinators. They are an important part of the food chain and play a critical role in the food supply of our nation. Without pollinators, we would soon face widespread food shortages.

Many pollinators are facing widespread decline. There is growing concern for North American migratory Monarch butterflies as they lose habitat due to urban development, agriculture, logging and herbicides. Consideration and discussions continue regarding listing the Monarch butterfly as a threatened or endangered species in the United States.

Honeybees are also important pollinators, but populations appear stable. Native bee populations, on the other hand, have suffered significant declines due to disease, pesticides and loss of habitat. A proven strategy to help bees, butterflies and other pollinators is to establish and maintain habitat in which they thrive.

Some of the native flowers and plants that we plant this fall will bloom next spring and will continue to mature over several years. We chose plant species that will not only be visually appealing but will support pollinators throughout the growing season.

And that benefits us all.