



COOK COUNTY
ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION
2021 ANNUAL REPORT

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BRIDGET DEGNEN
COOK COUNTY COMMISSIONER
12TH DISTRICT

December 15, 2021

Honorable President Toni Preckwinkle and Cook County Board of Commissioners:

In April 2019, the Environmental Commission was established by the Cook County Board via an ordinance I sponsored. The Environmental Commission is comprised of nine (9) members and its purpose is to identify and execute initiatives that reduce environmental damage within Cook County. The enabling Ordinance requires an annual report be completed and filed with the Board every January outlining the Commission's goals and accomplishments. During its February 10, 2020 meeting, the Commission voted on its first three goals: 1) to establish industrial composting in large arenas and government facilities; 2) to increase the urban tree canopy throughout Cook County; and 3) to amend the City of Chicago's weed ordinance to allow for native gardens. Below are a few highlights of the Commission's accomplishments in 2021:

- I. The Commission members worked with the City of Chicago to advocate for an amendment to the City of Chicago Streets and Sanitation code to allow for native gardens without homeowners risking fines and fees. This resulted in the establishment of a Native Garden Registry, attached to this report as Appendix A.
- II. In October 2021, the Environmental Commission partnered with Openlands and Cook County Facilities Management to plant 40 mature trees at the Bridgeview Courthouse. Over 70 volunteers assisted in the planting.
- III. As a part of our partnership with Openlands, the Commission developed the flyer attached to this report as Appendix B. In 2022, the Commission will distribute this flyer to people that are interested in planting trees in their communities. Openlands has indicated they can donate the trees in exchange for a commitment from communities to maintain the trees by mulching, watering,

CHAIR
Audit

VICE-CHAIR
Environment and
Sustainability
Rules and Administration

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Contract Compliance
Criminal Justice
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Workers' Compensation
Health and Hospitals
Department of Emergency
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Intergovernmental Relations
Technology and Innovation
Zoning and Building

and trimming trees as needed for three years. If a community near you needs trees, please send this flyer to them.

- IV. The Industrial Composting group reviewed national composting practices, data analytics, interviews and meetings with community stakeholder and organizational subject matter experts that provided recommendations for short-term composting best practices at county-run facilities as a model for subsequent implementation at other private and non-governmental facilities. The group identified a phase implementation approach to accomplish its goals, which will be developed in accordance with the suggested Cook County Industrial Compost Ordinance, currently in draft. The group also identified composting barriers that require further feasibility studies such as end-product use and the implementation of compost facilities and waste haulers.
- V. Pursuant to Cook County ordinance establishing the Environmental Commission, members serve on the Commission for two-year terms. The Commission saw its first term come to an end in October, and said goodbye to two members, Douglas Stotz, the representative of the not-for-profit sector, and Sarah Lovinger, the representative of the north triad. Chelsey Grassfield was approved by the Cook County Board of Commissioners as its new not-for-profit sector member. Chelsey is also an employee of Friends of the Chicago River. The new north triad representative, Michael Badame, will be approved by the Board in December 2021.

In 2021, the Commission also worked to save one of the last original prairie-lands in Illinois, the Bell Bowl Prairie in Rockford, Illinois, from destruction due to planned development. It also saw member Doug Stotz's work on migratory bird preservation celebrated. A letter reflecting this work is attached as Appendix C.

Pursuant to Chapter 2, Sec. 2-547, the ordinance establishing the Environmental Commission will be repealed November 30, 2022. The ordinance was written to include this automatic sunset provision to ensure the Commission did not become dormant, while remaining in our Cook County Code of Ordinances. It is my hope that in November of 2022, the Cook County Board of Commissioners will continue to still see value in this Commission and its work and amend the Ordinance deferring the automatic sunset provision to a later date. Yours,



Bridget Degnen

Chair, Cook County Environmental Commission

COOK COUNTY ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION

2021– 2023 MEMBERS

Commissioner Bridget Degnen – Chair, County Representative

- Commissioner of the 12th District

Commissioner Dennis Deer – Vice Chair, appointed by County Board President

- Commissioner of the 2nd District

Appointees

Alderman George Cardenas – City Representative/Mayoral Appointee

- Alderman of the 12th Ward, Chair of the City Council’s Environmental Protection and Energy Committee

Chelsey Grassfield – Non-Profit Representative

- Policy Manager at Friends of the Chicago River

Margaret Schneemann – Environmental Economist Representative

- Water Resource Economist at the University of Illinois Extension Sea Grant College Program

Mark Potosnak, PhD – Higher Education Representative

- Associate Professor and Chair of Environmental Science and Studies at DePaul University

Robert Mead – Corporate Representative

- Environmental Manager at Ingredient Incorporated

Michael Badame – North Triad Representative (Pending Board Approval December 2021)

- Facilities Operations Specialists at the Chicago Department of Aviation

Victoria Wilson -- South Triad Representative

- Environmental Specialist & Sustainability Consultant and Executive Director of Naturally Urban Environmental

COOK COUNTY ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION

2022 CALENDAR

All meetings to be held at 10:00 am.

February 2, 2022

April 13, 2022

June 8, 2022

August 10, 2022

October 12, 2022

December 7, 2022

COOK COUNTY ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION ORDINANCE

Sec. 2-540. - Short title.

This Division shall be known and may be cited as the Cook County Environmental Commission (Commission).

Sec. 2-551. - Purpose.

There is hereby created an Environmental Commission to serve the following purpose:

- (a) Ensure Cook County is a leader in combating global warming.
- (b) Create a working group of environmental professionals from Cook County's public and private sectors working together to devise and implement initiatives to combat global warming.
- (c) Promote sustainable legislation and policy aimed at reducing the carbon footprint within the geographic borders of Cook County.
- (d) Serve as a model for other governments by proactively combatting climate change with innovative and practical environmental initiatives.

Sec. 2-542. - Cook County Commission on Environmental Sustainability Membership.

- (a) The Commission will be composed of nine members including the original sponsor of this bill, who shall serve as Chair. The Chair shall be responsible for designating a successor if she ceases to serve as a Commissioner.
- (b) Six members shall be appointed by the Chair. These members shall represent the following:
 - (1) One member of the Commission shall be a representative from the north triad of Cook County.
 - (2) One member of the Commission shall be a representative from the south triad of Cook County.
 - (3) One member of the Commission shall be a representative from a not-for-profit.
 - (4) One member of the Commission shall be a corporate stakeholder with experience working on environmental initiatives.
 - (5) One member of the Commission shall be a representative from higher education or academia.
 - (6) One member of the Commission shall have a background in environmental economics.
- (c) The President of the Cook County Board of Commissioners shall appoint one member of the Commission. This person shall serve as the Vice Chair of the Commission.

- (d) The Mayor's Office of the City of Chicago shall appoint one member of the Commission.
- (e) All appointments shall be confirmed by the Cook County Board.

Sec. 2-543. - Term and vacancies.

- (a) Each member shall serve two-year terms.
- (b) The Chair shall serve for the duration of her term as a Cook County Commissioner. The Chair may serve consecutive terms.
- (c) Commission members may be reappointed for consecutive terms.
- (d) Vacancies on the Commission shall be filled in the same manner that original appointments were made and shall be filled for the unexpired term of the member whose appointment has become vacant.

Sec. 2-544. - Qualifications of members.

- (a) All members shall have like-minded goals stated in the Purpose section of this Division.
- (b) All members shall have subject matter knowledge, experience and/or education in environmental sustainability matters.

Sec. 2-545. - Meetings.

- (a) This Commission shall hold a meeting at least once every even numbered month, and meetings shall commence the second even numbered month following creation of the Commission.
- (b) Meeting dates shall be set for the following year, in December of the preceding year.
- (c) Should a member of the Commission miss three consecutive meetings, the Commission may choose to remove the member, and the original appointing member shall appoint a new member pursuant to subsection 30-976(c).
- (d) This Commission shall be subject to the Open Meetings Act, 5 ILCS 120/1 et seq, and the Freedom of Information Act, 5 ILCS 140/1 et seq.

Sec. 2-546. - Powers, duties, and responsibilities.

- (a) The Commission shall serve as a working Commission and in an advisory role to the Cook County Board on matters relating to environmental sustainability, reduction of greenhouse gases and reduction of environmental impacts in Cook County. The Commission shall be responsible for:
 - (1) Considering environmental impacts on surface water, groundwater, air and land in Cook County and making appropriate recommendations to the Cook County Board, local municipalities and the Chicago City Council to mitigate harmful impacts and promote positive change;
 - (2) Creating an annual work plan in furtherance of the Commission's goals and solicit input from stakeholders via its members.

- (3) Beginning in January 2020, creating an annual report and presenting it to the Cook County Board via the Environment and Sustainability Committee; and
- (4) Collaborating in regional environmental associations and with other local environmental stakeholders.

Sec. 2-547. - Division scheduled to be repealed on November 30, 2022.

- (a) *Repeal of division.* This Division is repealed on November 30, 2022.

COOK COUNTY ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION
APPENDIX A

SUBSTITUTE
ORDINANCE

BE IT ORDAINED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF CHICAGO:

SECTION 1. Section 2-100-030 of the Municipal Code of Chicago is hereby amended by adding the language underscored, and by deleting the language struck through, as follows:

2-100-030 Commissioner - Powers and duties.

The ~~commissioner~~ Commissioner of ~~streets~~ Streets and ~~sanitation~~ Sanitation shall have supervision of the sanitation of the public ways of the city and the lighting thereof except where such improvement is to be paid for wholly or in part by special assessment; the cleaning of public ways and the removal of garbage, refuse and waste, the removal of any article or thing which may encumber or obstruct any public way; the establishment and maintenance of a managed native and pollinator garden registry as provided in Section 10-32-055; the administration and operation of the Chicago skyway toll bridge; and the installation and inspection of all electrical equipment not specifically provided for by other sections of this ordinance.

The ~~commissioner~~ Commissioner of ~~streets~~ Streets and ~~sanitation~~ Sanitation or ~~his~~ the Commissioner's designee is authorized to negotiate and enter into intergovernmental agreements, which may include an obligation to indemnify, with the Chicago Park District in order to provide or receive services related to rodent control, snow removal, refuse removal, and other services within the scope of duties of the ~~department~~ Department of ~~streets~~ Streets and ~~sanitation~~ Sanitation, with respect to property located within the ~~City~~ city boundaries.

SECTION 2. Chapter 10-32 of the Municipal Code of Chicago is hereby amended by adding a new Section 10-32-055, as follows:

10-32-055 Managed native and pollinator garden registry.

(a) The Department of Streets and Sanitation shall establish and maintain a registry of managed native and pollinator gardens, without cost to its registrants. The Department may promulgate rules regarding standards and processes associated with the establishment and maintenance of, and inclusion in, the registry of such gardens.

(b) For purposes of this section, the term "managed native and pollinator garden" or "garden" means a planned, intentional, and maintained planting of native plants and plants that are pollinator-friendly.

(c) Any property owner wishing to maintain a managed native and pollinator garden may apply to register the garden with the Department of Streets and Sanitation. The managed native and pollinator garden must be maintained in accordance with rules established by the Department. Managed native and pollinator gardens in good standing on the registry shall not be subject to Section 7-28-120. Failure to maintain the managed native and pollinator garden in accordance with this section and the rules hereunder may result in the Commissioner removing the garden from the registry.

(d) To be eligible to be in the registry:

(1) the managed native and pollinator garden shall be on an occupied property or a community garden that meets the definition and requirements of Section 17-9-0103.5.

(2) the managed native and pollinator garden shall not have any plants encroach on the public sidewalk or extend beyond the property line. Similarly, if a permit for a managed native and pollinator garden in the parkway is acquired, any managed native and pollinator garden in a parkway shall not have plants, excluding trees, taller than ten inches.

(3) the plants within the garden will have been intentionally planted by seed or transplantation into the garden. Owners must be able to identify the plants contained within the garden.

(e) (1) If a garden on the registry violates subsection (c), (d)(1), or (d)(3) of this section, the garden shall be removed from the registry.

(2) If a garden on the registry violates subsection (d)(2) of this section, the owner of the property shall be issued an administrative notice of violation, which shall list a date and time for a hearing with the Department of Administrative Hearings. If the owner brings the property into compliance prior to the hearing date, the City shall withdraw the administrative notice of violation. An owner who fails to bring the property into compliance prior to the hearing date shall be liable for a fine of \$100.

(f) Nothing in this section shall be construed to allow the section to conflict with the Illinois Noxious Weed Law, 505 ILCS 100/1 *et seq.*

(g) A Native and Pollinator Garden Registry Advisory Board shall be created. The Advisory Board will have the authority to review garden-related applications and complaints and make recommendations to the Commissioner. The Board shall be appointed by the Mayor and shall be made up of:

(1) One representative from the Department of Streets and Sanitation

(2) One representative from the Department of Planning and Development

(3) One representative from the Chicago Park District

(4) One member of the City Council

(5) One member from an organization representing community gardeners across the City

(6) One member from an organization representing urban agriculture growers

(7) One member from an organization that supports and owns conservation land in the City

(8) One member who has an expertise in a relevant subject, such as biology, botany, ecology, or horticulture

(9) One member from a cultural or scientific institution

(h) The Commissioner, or the Commissioner's designee, shall review applications to the registry. If, after consultation with the Native and Pollinator Garden Registry Advisory Board, the Commissioner determines that the applicant's garden meets the requirements, then the garden shall be placed in the registry. If the garden is not compliant with the requirements of this section or if violations are found at a garden, the Commissioner, after consulting with the Advisory Board, shall remove a garden from the registry.

SECTION 3. This ordinance shall be in full force and effect ten days following passage and publication.

BRIAN HOPKINS
Alderman, 2nd Ward

**COOK COUNTY ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION
APPENDIX B**



Cook County Commissioner **BRIDGET DEGNEN**



Environmental Commission

WHAT IS THE ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION?

The Cook County Environmental Commission was created through an ordinance introduced by Commissioner Degnen. The goal of the Commission is to ensure Cook County is a global leader in the fight against climate change. Nine people from various environmental sectors serve on the Commission.



WHAT ARE THE GOALS OF THE COMMISSION?



The Commission votes on goals it would like to accomplish. The first three goals are to expand the industrial composting and recycling capacity of the County, to increase the tree canopy throughout the County and to amend Chicago's weed ordinance to allow for native gardens without the risk of fines. The Commission has officially crossed the weed ordinance off its list with the passage of:

HOW CAN I GET INVOLVED?

Members serve on the Commission for 2 year terms. In October of 2021, the Commission selected its members for its second term. There are many other ways to get involved! You can watch the monthly Commission meetings, email Commissioner Degnen's office at district12@cookcountyil.gov, call 773-283-7873 or visit commissionerdegnen.com for more information under the "environment" tab.



IS THE COMMISSION ON SOCIAL MEDIA?



Yes! The Commission wants to connect with environmentally focused citizens of Cook County and beyond. We are looking to expand our social media reach. You can follow us on Instagram at [@ccenvironmentalcommission](https://www.instagram.com/ccenvironmentalcommission). A monthly newsletter will be announced soon.

WHAT HAS THE COMMISSION ACCOMPLISHED?

Despite being created right before the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Commission has accomplished much in its 2 year existence. The Commission advocated for and helped pass the creation of Chicago's new Native Garden Registry to allow residents to grow essential native gardens without fear of fines from the city. Additionally, the Commission planted 40 mature trees at the Bridgeview Courthouse, with plans to plant more at other Courthouses in the near future.



DISTRICT OFFICE

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DOWNTOWN OFFICE

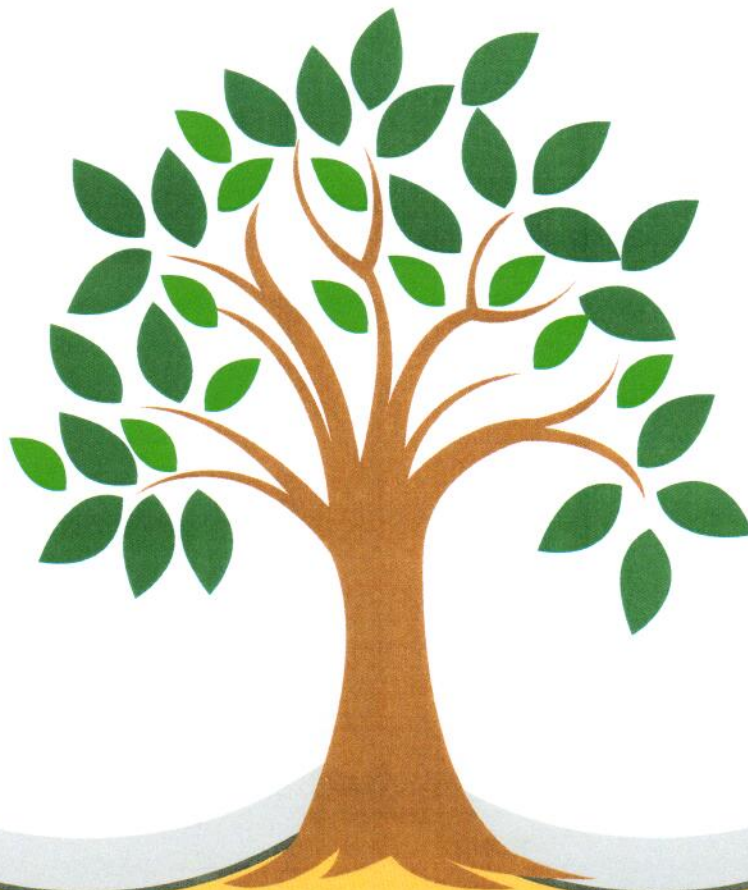
**118 N Clark Street, 5th Floor
Chicago, IL 60613
312-603-6830**

Cook County Environmental Commission

HELP US GROW THE TREE CANOPY

Do you know of a community in need of trees? The Cook County Environmental Commission want to help! Openlands has grants available for tree planting throughout the County. A 3 year care commitment of watering, mulching, and trimming is required.

Email District12@cookcountyil.gov for more information.



COOK COUNTY ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION
APPENDIX C

COUNTY BUILDING

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BRIDGET DEGNEN
COOK COUNTY COMMISSIONER
12TH DISTRICT

CHAIR
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Rules and Administration

MEMBER
Contract Compliance
Criminal Justice
Finance
Finance Subcommittee on Litigation
Finance Subcommittee on
Workers' Compensation
Health and Hospitals
Department of Emergency Management and
Regional Security
Labor
Legislation and Intergovernmental Relations
Technology and Innovation
Zoning and Building

October 26, 2021

Dear Chicago Rockford International Airport Board Member,

The below-referenced members of the Cook County Environmental Commission write out of concern about the impending construction at the Chicago Rockford International Airport and the devastation it will cause to the historic Bell Bowl Prairie. One of the environmental experts on the Cook County Environmental Commission is ornithologist and Senior Conservation Ecologist, Dr. Douglas Stotz. Dr. Stotz's studies include the effects of habitat loss on regional bird populations and their symbiotic relationship to other geographically relevant species. The below undersigned are extremely troubled to learn that one of the last remaining high quality gravel hill prairies in Illinois, located on the western edge of the Chicago Wilderness region, will be destroyed in a few days to expand the Rockford Airport cargo space. We ask that you urge the Chicago Rockford International Airport to delay the construction on the Bell Bowl Prairie until additional investigation can be performed to confirm the impact on this area and an alternative plan can be developed.

Bell Bowl Prairie is a site of both ecological and historical importance. North American prairies once stretched 170 million acres from the Rocky Mountains to east of the Mississippi River, and from Saskatchewan south to Texas. Rich and diverse prairies that took over a millennium to develop, used to cover 22 million acres of Illinois. Today, less than 1/100th of one percent of that original prairie land remains, and each fragment that survives is unique. Illinois is named the prairie state for a reason, and it's axiomatic that we must preserve the remaining prairie. The Bell Bowl Prairie is irreplaceable and the complex ecological associations that make this prairie special cannot be reconstructed or transplanted. It would be a shame to allow this irreplaceable prairie to be eviscerated to make way for a cargo building, a building that could be built anywhere else.

Prairies continue to be one of the most endangered ecosystems on earth and one of the rarest prairie types in Illinois is the gravel hill prairie, with only 148 acres of varying quality known to still exist¹. The plan to expand the Rockford airport will destroy five high-quality acres of Bell Bowl Prairie, a gravel hill prairie designated as a Type I site by the Illinois Natural Areas Inventory, that represents a rare example of the habitat created in this region 8,000 years ago and one that has developed into one of the most complex and diverse ecosystems on Earth². This is a distressing and avoidable loss of the State's precious natural and cultural resources.

¹ Illinois Department of Natural Resources. Gravel Prairie.

<https://www2.illinois.gov/dnr/education/Pages/CDHabitatGravelPrairie.aspx> Accessed 2021-10-11.

² A complex Prairie Ecosystem. <https://www.nps.gov/taprl/learn/nature/a-complex-prairie-ecosystem.htm>, 2021-10-11.

This natural gem is home to numerous plants that can only survive in high-quality areas, including the state endangered Prairie Dandelion (*Nothocalais cuspidate*) and Large-flowered Beardtongue (*Penstemon grandiflorus*)³. The federally endangered Rusty Patched Bumble Bee (*Bombus affines*)⁴, which uses the above ground habitat to forage for food during the active season and hibernates in the soil during the winter⁵, has also been documented at the site. Destroying this prairie goes against the very spirit of the federal Endangered Species Act and the state legislature, which is to protect wildlife and their habitat.

The Biden administration has committed to protecting open space under the America the Beautiful plan to preserve biodiversity and mitigate climate change. This prairie represents one of the steps Illinois can contribute to those goals and lead the charge by ensuring important ecosystems remain intact.

The below referenced members of the Cook County Environmental Commission wholeheartedly supports the Illinois 30x30 Conservation Task Force Act signed by Governor Pritzker in August 2021, which authorizes the formation of a task force designed to determine ways Illinois can protect 30% of its land and water resources by 2030. Protecting Bell Bowl Prairie and saving other small fragments of remaining prairie in partnership with private and public landowners embodies exactly the type of action required to meet this bold goal and truly address the deterioration of natural systems, loss of biodiversity, and the lack of access to green space and natural areas of all Illinoisans.

There is no serious disagreement about the need to revitalize Illinois' infrastructure, and it would be easy to support a responsible expansion of capacity at Chicago Rockford International Airport, but this situation need not pit nature against jobs. No one can argue that damaging a rare and irreplaceable ecosystem like Bell Bowl Prairie is a good thing for our environment. Designing an expansion plan to meet the needs of the company, community and environment is possible, and your leadership is needed to make it happen. This prairie has continued to develop in this unique space since the retreat of the last glacier, thousands of years ago. The biodiversity that survives here, if cared for properly, will be here for thousands of years into the future and to destroy or diminish this prairie would be short-sighted. As a Board member of the Chicago Rockford International Airport, we call upon you to preserve what little remains of these critical habitats. We urge you to halt the current plans until an alternative plan is developed that provides benefits to Rockford Airport without destroying one of the rarest habitats in Illinois.

Yours,

Bridget Degnen
Cook County Commissioner, 12th District
Cook County Environmental Commission – Chair

Dennis Deer
Cook County Commissioner, 2nd District
Cook County Environmental Commission–Vice Chair

Victoria Wilson
Cook County Environmental Commission

Douglas Stotz
Cook County Environmental Commission

George Cardenas
City of Chicago Alderman, 12th Ward
Cook County Environmental Commission

Mark Potosnak
Cook County Environmental Commission

³ iNaturalist users @skrentnyjeff, @dziomber, @jonidenker, @mrostrowski, and @edwardcope. Observations at Bell Bowl Prairie. https://www.inaturalist.org/observations?place_id=176660 Accessed 2021-10-01.

⁴ Natural Land Institute. 2021-09-20. NLI and the Bell Bowl Prairie at Rockford Airport. <https://www.naturalland.org/nli-and-the-bell-bowl-prairie-at-rockford-airport/> Accessed 2021-10-11.

⁵ U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. 2017a. Rusty Patched Bumble Bee Life History. <https://www.fws.gov/midwest/endangered/insects/rpbb/lifehistory.html> Accessed 2021-10-11.