

## The Butterfly Basin Initiative

The Butterfly Basin initiative is a program to encourage and assist landowners to retrofit or manage existing storm water detention and retention basins as quality habitat for butterflies.



The program will also assist owners of the storm water structures, and the entities charged with regulating them. It will provide a formal process to inspect, manage, and maintain the structures in accordance with the original design criteria and changing needs. It will change what is potentially an eyesore into an aesthetically pleasing landscape asset.

The initiative develops a standardized process and training program for the parties involved. The process will work something like this:

**The Management Plan:** A short written plan will be prepared which identifies what will be done and who will be responsible for doing it. This will be a cooperative effort between the

owner and the individuals involved in the management. It will identify specific characteristics of the structure, storm water compliance requirements, vegetation management recommendations, and any special considerations. All parties involved will sign off on the plan.

The plan will be updated on a regular schedule—most likely annually, in order to respond to changing conditions.

The program will develop a template to use in preparation of a plan, but each plan will be individualized to the situation.

### Vegetation

**Management:** The site will be planted with a mix of native plants appropriate for the structure and the



conditions of the site. This may be done by the owner or the owner's representative, or by an external entity. In most cases the owner will be responsible for paying for this.

The native plants used for this process will be selected in order to minimize continuing maintenance, but some mowing, cutting, pulling, or weed spraying will be required.

**Inspections and Butterfly Surveys:**

Approximately every two to three weeks during the season, butterfly surveys will be conducted. The survey will be combined with a physical inspection of the structure and photos will be taken. At the end of the season a report of the butterflies seen will be prepared, and incorporated into the annual update of the management plan.



It is envisioned that butterfly surveys will be conducted by specially trained volunteers, and that the surveys will be as inclusive as possible. Surveyors will be encouraged to take friends or involve children in the process. School classes (although most surveys will of necessity be conducted in the summer months) can be involved.

There is no requirement that the surveyors be unpaid volunteers, however. Some situations might have more of a for-profit, "turnkey" approach, and have paid surveyors.

**Physical Maintenance of the Structure:** Most structures will require some kind of physical maintenance at some time. Periodic inspections will determine the need, and in most cases the owner will be responsible.

**Everybody wins:** Active management of the basin allows the owner to be assured that the structure functions as designed and is in compliance with applicable laws. Water quality is improved. A potential eyesore becomes an attractive asset. Native vegetation becomes a showy butterfly habitat. The numbers and diversity of butterflies go back up, at least for that small area. And people reconnect with butterflies.

Everybody wins.

The Butterfly Basin Initiative is a program that is still in its infancy. I am looking to partner with others to make this happen.

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