

## NATURE AT RISK

### **BEE KIND — THREE WAYS YOU CAN HELP RUSTY PATCHED BUMBLE BEES SURVIVE**

*From Brodhead Watershed Association*

Being a bee is no walk in the park.

Rusty-patched bumble bees are only about half an inch long. Yet they may fly up to a mile foraging for food. They need constant supplies of nectar and pollen from many different kinds of flowers, starting in spring right through fall. And they nest in the ground, exposed to pesticides and other chemicals that can hurt or kill them.

Is it any wonder that once humans carved up their habitat, the rusty-patched bumble bee (*Bombus affinis*) became endangered?

Formerly found all across eastern and upper midwest North America, including here in Pennsylvania, the bees inhabited prairies and grasslands and other natural landscapes. As humans remade that habitat, planted intensive monocultures of just one flowering crop, and built roads and cities, today the tiny creatures' range has shrunk to about 15 percent of what it once was.

And that's bad not just for the bees, but also for us.

Bumble bees are a "keystone species" — critters that play a crucial, irreplaceable role in their habitat. Bumble bees are almost the only insects that pollinate tomatoes, and they're among the most important pollinators of blueberries and cranberries. Their busy work creates fruits and seeds needed by everything from songbirds to bears, not to mention humans.

You can help:

- Make sure your landscape has native plants flowering from April through September — add a shadbush, butterfly weed, or autumn goldenrod, for example. Find native plants to buy at <https://shop.brodheadwatershed.org/>
- Leave a healthy-sized area undisturbed — let clumps of grasses grow, don't till or otherwise work the soil, and if you find a nest, count your blessings and let it be!
- And lay off the pesticides and chemical fertilizers, or at least minimize them.

Brodhead Watershed Association offers native plants to buy at <https://shop.brodheadwatershed.org/>

For more information about the rusty patched bumble bee, go to [https://www.fws.gov/sites/default/files/documents/508\\_RPBB-factsheet.pdf](https://www.fws.gov/sites/default/files/documents/508_RPBB-factsheet.pdf)



Photo credit USFWS

*The rusty patched bumble bee is one of more than 20 species of bumble bees. The name comes from the reddish-brown patch in the middle of the backs of males and worker bees. The rusty patched bumble bee (*Bombus affinis*) has been designated endangered by U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service*

*Nature at Risk is a series published by Brodhead Watershed Association. See [brodheadwatershed.org](http://brodheadwatershed.org).*

