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*Conservation Council of New Brunswick*

## Conservation Council calls for action as bee population plummets

With close to 40% die-off in domestic honeybees in New Brunswick this past winter, the Conservation Council of New Brunswick is concerned about the health of New Brunswick's native bees. "Wild bumblebees and other native bees give life to our natural ecosystems and feed us. Our blueberry crop is dependent on New Brunswick's bumblebees," stated Tracy Glynn, Acadian Forest Campaign Coordinator.

"The time to act is now. It's imperative that the provincial government determine the status of New Brunswick's native bee populations, ban the cosmetic use of pesticides and protect pollinator habitat," stated Glynn. "New Brunswickers can ensure their gardens are bee-friendly by going pesticide-free and planting native wildflowers that bloom at different times, feeding bees throughout their life. Degraded lands can also be restored as pollinator-friendly areas."

A precipitous decline in pollinators has been recognized by the recent scientific report entitled Status of Pollinators in North America. Canadian scientist Sheila Colla published her research in the journal Biodiversity and Conservation last year, which provided the first quantitative evidence of declines in the diversity and relative abundance of native bumblebee species in eastern Canada. She found that half the bee species she studied were declining and two had been virtually wiped out.

"More than viruses and weather have been attributed to the declining populations of bees. Scientists are suggesting pesticides, pollution and habitat destruction as other likely reasons for the continuing declines in insect pollinators. In fact it was the dramatic decline in pollinators in New Brunswick wrought by the spruce budworm spray program which catalyzed world-wide interest in the state of insect pollinators," stated Megan de Graaf, the Conservation Council's forest ecologist.

Acadian forest trees like the black cherry and basswood require insect pollination, as do shrubs like hazelnut and staghorn sumac, flowers like spring beauty and trilliums, and native berries such as blueberries and cranberries are important agricultural crops. Blueberries in particular are an important industry in New Brunswick; the province's second-largest cash crop after potatoes. In 2008, 33 million pounds of blueberries were harvested in New Brunswick, putting \$19.8 million directly into the pockets of farmers. Blueberries are most efficiently pollinated by native pollinators such as bumblebees.

The Conservation Council of New Brunswick (CCNB), a long time defender of natural ecosystems and local agriculture, is a member of the Canadian Pollination Initiative (CanPolin). CanPolin is a research network dedicated to addressing the growing problem of pollinator decline in agricultural and natural ecosystems in Canada.