**Top 10 Reasons to Plant Pollinator Friendly Vegetation at Your Solar Site**

Pollinator seed mixes are all the buzz for renewable energy projects, especially since pollinator insect species are on the decline and very important to the agricultural industry. These specialized seed mixes contain plant species that attract, and are preferred by, pollinators such as bees and butterflies.

While planting pollinator mixes can attract bees which make great honey, these mixes can provide more benefits to your solar project than just a sweet treat. The use of pollinator mixes can also provide a good public relations opportunity for your project.

1. **Voluntarily certify your project as “Pollinator Friendly”**

* In May 2016, the Minnesota Legislature approved a voluntary “truth in advertising” policy that allows solar developers to certify their projects as “pollinator friendly”.  This voluntary program provides recommended planting and maintenance standards for solar projects.  This is an added project benefit related to local, state, and federal permits regarding your solar project.

1. **Reduce costs when compared to inputs of agricultural crop production**

* The plants store nutrients on the landscape, which creates a self-sustaining ecosystem unlike agricultural crop production that requires added inputs like reseeding, fertilizer, and herbicide applications that increase cost to the producer.

1. **Reduce construction costs**

* Spreading pollinator seed mix on your site is cheaper than installing gravel over the same area. Additionally, using pollinator plants instead of gravel can save the project money by reducing or eliminating the need for onsite storm water treatment because pollinator plants are considered pervious surfaces.

1. **Require minimal vegetation maintenance**

* Pollinator plant communities require minimal maintenance once established, thereby reducing costs of weed and invasive plant species management.

1. **Eliminate the need for routine fertilizer and herbicide application on your landscape**
   * Established pollinator plants do not require the use of fertilizers or herbicides. By not using these chemicals, fewer nutrients and pollutants are entering the water system. This provides protection of surface water and groundwater water resources, ultimately protecting our drinking water.
2. **Retain more rainfall on the landscape which can reduce erosion and surface water runoff**
   * The plants’ deep root systems filter and store water on the landscape, increasing permeability and providing water infiltration.
3. **Provide habitat and food source for pollinators, beneficial insects, and wildlife.**
   * Pollinator friendly plants provide more shelter, nesting habitat, and food sources for a variety of insect populations that support wildlife species.
4. **Restore soil health**
   * The deep root systems that reduce erosion also build the soil by adding soil organic matter to the ecosystem*.*
5. **Promote native plant diversity** 
   * Pollinator communities support greater diversity of vegetation types and native species, which helps improve wildlife habitat.
6. **Create continuous native plant corridors that increase the long-term sustainability and maintain native ecosystems**
   * Planting pollinator friendly vegetation can provide connectivity and greenway corridors to benefit plant and wildlife populations.

**References:**

*Minnesota Board of Soil and Water Resources (2015). Native Vegetation Establishment and Enhancement Guidelines. MNBWSR Saint Paul MN.*

*Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan – A habitat plan for native prairie, grassland and wetlands in the Prairie Region of western Minnesota.*

*Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (2016). Prairie Establishment & Maintenance Technical Guidance for Solar Projects.*