



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Contacts:

Julie Borgmann, Red-tail Land Conservancy - 765-744-1106
Jesse Kharbanda, Hoosier Environmental Council - 317-979-3236
Rob Davis, Fresh Energy - 612-423-4536

Agriculture, Conservation, and Clean Energy Leaders Praise Farsighted Solar Ordinance

Randolph County's newly adopted law will help address major habitat declines.

WINCHESTER, IN – On Friday, July 24, Randolph County Commissioners adopted a first-ever solar energy ordinance which includes a pollinator-friendly provision ahead of construction of Indiana's largest solar farm. [Riverstart Solar Park](#), developed by EDP Renewables, is set to be located over 1,400 acres in the southwest corner of Randolph county. Passed on a unanimous vote of 3-0 to welcome the \$242 million project, the new ordinance includes a land stewardship provision requiring the groundcover of Riverstart and future solar farms in the county to be native meadow grasses and pollinator-friendly wildflower forbs and/or clover.

"The officials of Randolph County have created a win-win situation for their community and the environment with this ordinance. The acres of habitat that will be created will not only be beautiful but also have an incredible impact for wildlife and future generations of people in Randolph County," said Julie Borgmann, Executive Director of Red-tail Land Conservancy, who testified at a recent public hearing.



Native grasses and wildflowers can support a wide variety of pollinators. © 2017 Fresh Energy

Encouraging county officials to adopt the solar facility land use best practice, a letter from Purdue University Entomologist Dr. Brock Harpur noted:

“A recent study found that more than 50,000 acres of our Indiana conservation lands—healthy habitat for wildlife—were converted to row crop fields over an 8-year period. During this same time the health of Indiana pollinators has plummeted. Native pollinator species numbers are lower than the number needed to pollinate crops and managed species, such as honey bees, experience greater than average losses each year (as many as 63% of colonies are lost annually in Indiana). Among the primary causes of pollinator decline is habitat loss.”

Conservation leaders also expressed support for Randolph County’s decision. Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever wrote in a letter of support, “Large-scale solar projects proposed in Indiana have, so far, overlooked a critical opportunity to provide additional—and urgently needed—agricultural and ecological benefits. We see a once-in-a-generation opportunity to encourage land use and stewardship practices that provide healthy food sources for beneficial insects and improve the quality of our precious Indiana soils.”

A national organization that accelerates the adoption of low-impact PV solar designs, including the use of pollinator-friendly ground cover, noted the significance of Randolph County’s decision. “EDP Renewables’ use of pollinator-friendly ground cover with this exciting 200 MW solar project for Hoosier Energy demonstrates the company’s community-focused values and considerable skill at embracing innovation,” said Rob Davis, Director of the Center for Pollinators in Energy at Fresh Energy, a nonprofit.

Randolph County’s new solar ordinance, and EDP’s upcoming Riverstart project, are indicative of broader trends in Indiana. “Solar is going to become a vibrant part of rural Indiana,” remarked Jesse Kharbanda, Executive Director of the Hoosier Environmental Council (HEC). “Such solar farms will not only produce pollution-free energy, but, with the right local policy in place, they will help to preserve soil and water and create habitats that benefit Indiana’s birds, bees, and other wildlife. We know that additional Indiana rural counties are formulating their solar ordinances, and HEC and our partners will be helpful in connecting these counties with resources and experts so that their farmers, businesses, and residents can reap the benefits of not only solar-produced electricity, but the many benefits of land stewardship best practices.”



Solar panels on turf grass. © 2017 American Public Power Association

Earlier this year an association of northern Indiana counties [published a guide](#) on pollinator-friendly solar, and an Indiana-based energy analyst for [EQ Research published a detailed report](#) on the topic. In celebration of an 80-acre pollinator-friendly solar array being developed by Inovateus Solar, the City of Logansport [officially proclaimed](#) June 26 as “Bird and Pollinator-Friendly Solar Day.” The *Indianapolis Star* wrote in-depth about the project under the headline “[A Magical Solution: solar developers planting flowers that could help save butterflies and bees.](#)”

[\[Slideshow showing several pollinator-friendly solar projects. Images available upon request from Fresh Energy.\]](#)

RED-TAIL LAND CONSERVANCY is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization that protects and connects habitats where wildlife and people can thrive together forever. By preserving and restoring the dynamic vitality of forests, prairies, and wetlands, Red-tail Land Conservancy plans for a future where the natural beauty of east central Indiana will exist for generations to come. More information is at www.fortheland.org.

HOOSIER ENVIRONMENTAL COUNCIL is Indiana’s largest environmental policy organization, working to improve environmental health, protect land & water, and foster the sustainable economy. HEC’s thirty-seven years of advocacy have helped to create state protected lands and have helped to advance and defend public policies related to solar energy. Learn more at hecweb.org.

THE CENTER FOR POLLINATORS IN ENERGY is a program of nonprofit energy organization, Fresh Energy, and accelerates the agricultural and ecological compatibility of photovoltaic solar power plants. More information is available at www.BeesLoveSolar.org.

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For more info & quotes:

Julie Borgmann, Executive Director- Red-tail Land Conservancy
(o) 765-288-2587 (c) 765-744-1106 julie@fortheland.org

Jesse Kharbanda, Executive Director- Hoosier Environmental Council
317-979-3236 jkharbanda@hecweb.org

Rob Davis, Director- Center for Pollinators in Energy
612-423-4536 davis@fresh-energy.org