



GUEST OPINION

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Go green on local level: Help monarchs

By David Osterberg

When we consider Earth Day, some folks think of polar bears, even though they might only have seen one in a zoo or a Coke commercial.

You're in Iowa. Think of monarch butterflies. You used to see a lot of them, right in your back yard, feeding on plants then flitting off to the south.

Not anymore. Habitat loss, pesticides and loss of milkweed plants are the main cause but our changing climate, disrupted by the pollutants that we humans have put into the atmosphere, will be the long-term killer of this beautiful migration.

A speaker from Monarch Watch came to Cornell College in Mount Vernon last week to urge Iowans to plant more milkweed plants to try to restore the great Monarch migration to Mexico. Let's do that.

We all can bring our talents to solve our various environmental problems. Consider Gwynned Vetter-Drusch, a student in a high school summer program I taught at the University of Iowa. After high school in Manson, she chose not to attend college, but went instead to New York City to become a dancer.

She formed "Moving for Monarchs," and brought fellow dancers to a prairie in Kansas to dance with the monarch butterflies. She made a film (check YouTube) and on the strength of that film has found the funds to do another following the monarchs to the state of Michoacan in Mexico. (<https://www.facebook.com/movingformonarchs>)

A few years ago so many butterflies made the long trek to Mexico that they covered over 45 acres in forests of Michoacan. Last year they took over less than two acres because so few can now make it.

Dancing raises awareness. We all can do something — and some of it is easy, such as turning off the water when brushing teeth and sharing rides to work. But we also must get involved in local policy.

Iowa has a solar tax credit that decreases the cost of putting solar panels on our roofs because of legislation sponsored by Senator Joe Bolkcom of Iowa City. Sponsoring is good but it's not enough. The rest of us had to urge our local legislators to vote for it or it would not have become law.

We need many more laws to encourage renewable energy. We need to close old coal-fired power plants. We need to demand better gas mileage for our vehicles. We need to use rebates from our utility companies to insulate our homes and install better lighting. But,

mainly we need our leaders to understand and accept that policy matters, and to confront those who deny the undeniable reality of climate change.

We must convince more Americans that this path is necessary — that our economy must adapt to the challenge and drive solutions. The evidence is in our backyards, and some solutions presented by people we know.

While pictures of glacier withdrawal and sea ice reductions are compelling evidence of what is happening globally, solutions begin at home. Think of how good it would be to see the monarchs again.

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