

PGMNH Board Meeting - Jan 13, 2010  
Agenda Item XA: Monarch Grove Sanctuary - Stewardship

Date: Dec 23, 2009  
To: Pacific Grove Museum Board  
From: Sharon Blaziek and John Pearse

Subject: Stewardship of the Monarch Grove Sanctuary and  
the Monarch Butterflies in Pacific Grove

Following the request of then Chair of the Museum Board David Shonman at the Board's meeting of December 15, 2009, we met to discuss how the monarch butterflies that overwinter in Pacific Grove could be cared for in a responsible and scientifically sound manner. We recognize that the butterflies have been, and continue to be, an iconic feature of Pacific Grove, bringing both fascination and beauty to the town as well as attracting tourists. They spend the winter from about October to March sheltered in branches of trees at various places in the city, especially in the Monarch Grove Sanctuary and Washington Park. The number that overwinter in Pacific Grove vary from year to year, but have been in decline in recent years. The reason for the decline is not understood, but could be due to habitat destruction in their summer(breeding)inland range. However, maintaining suitable habitats in overwintering sites, where they can shelter from winter storms, is also important for their continued survival.

The problem is that suitable groves of trees (Monterey pines, eucalyptus) vary over time as they grow and then shed limbs or die. Moreover, fire can threaten the groves, especially if the accumulation of debris occurs that could fuel the fires. In addition, some branches, which might be attractive to the butterflies, can get large and weakened posing a danger to people and property if they break and fall. Understanding these issues is critical to managing the overwintering sites.

The assessment of the Monarch Grove Sanctuary in Pacific Grove made by Dr. Stuart Weiss for the City in 1998 remains the sole guideline for managing the butterfly groves. Changes have occurred since that report was written with both the sanctuary and the people involved. The Monarch Grove Sanctuary is on City property and has been maintained by the Public Works Department with advice from the City's arborist, mainly with respect to public safety. The welfare of the butterflies has been looked after informally by two

former Directors of the Museum (Steve Bailey and Paul Finnegan) and a volunteer group: Friends of the Monarchs, led by the late Ro Vaccaro. The current Director of the Museum, Lori Mannel, an employee of the Museum Foundation of Pacific Grove, is not responsible for the monarchs. The Friends of the Monarchs merged with the Museum Association in 2008, which continued to be responsible for training the docents at the Sanctuary. However, the Museum Association now is in the process of dissolving, and while the Museum will continue to train and coordinate the docents, it will not be directly providing oversight of the welfare of the butterflies.

In short, there is currently no single group or person responsible for the welfare of the iconic monarch butterflies that overwinter in Pacific Grove, "Butterfly Town, U.S.A." At the Museum Board's meeting of December 15, 2009, a motion was passed that said:

"Whereas the Pacific Grove Museum of Natural History serves as a regional and educational resource center for scientific information, the Museum Board recommends that the Beautification & Natural Resources Committee be responsible for advising the City Council on scientific guidelines for protecting the City's natural resources, including the Monarch Grove Sanctuary."

We do not know whether or how the Beautification & Natural Resources Committee will take such responsibility. However, in our opinion, it would be good to have one person oversee the welfare of the monarch butterflies in Pacific Grove. That person could (1) report to the BNRC and/or the City Manager, (2) up-date the report prepared by Dr. Weiss to make it a full management plan to be followed by City staff, and (3) serve as a point person to provide the best scientific advice available about the butterflies and their well-being to all concerned citizens. Perhaps that person could be Dr. Weiss, held on a retainer, or Dr. Francis Villablanca, the current advisor to the Monarch Alert of the Ventana Wildlife Society.

We recommend that after full discussion, the Museum Board make an appropriate resolution on this matter to be considered by the City Council.