
Background: SB3214

Pollinator Friendly Solar Site Act

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The Future Energy Jobs Act has spurred a significant increase in the development of solar projects on rural land throughout Illinois. While the land on which a solar project is sited typically cannot be farmed during the operational life of a system, it can still be used in a way that benefits the environment through the planting of native vegetation and foraging habitat that provides needed benefits to local pollinators and birds. This popular practice is being increasingly adopted by solar developers, as it is attractive to land owners, conservation advocates, and developers alike.



To tailor this practice to the various local habitats throughout Illinois and provide a common standard recognized by the state for use in evaluating claims of providing benefits to pollinators and birds, the Illinois General Assembly unanimously passed [SB 3214](#) on May 28, 2018. The bill creates a voluntary standard and set of criteria for pollinator-friendly solar site management through the use of a [scorecard](#) drafted by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (DNR) in consultation with the University of Illinois Department of Entomology. An owner/manager of a ground-mounted solar generation system over 40 kW in size may claim that a site is “pollinator-friendly” or provides benefits to game birds, songbirds, and pollinators only if the site adheres to the guidance set forth by this scorecard and achieves a certain score. A final version of the scorecard will be published within 6 months of the bill being signed into law.

Bill Summary

- Passed unanimously by both the Illinois Senate (54-0) and the Illinois General Assembly (114-0)
- Creates a voluntary standard for pollinator-friendly solar site management
- The draft [scorecard](#) used to assess compliance allows a site to achieve two different standards:
 - Meets Pollinator Standards (score of 70 – 84)
 - Provides Exceptional Habitat (score of 85 and higher)
- A final version of the scorecard will be published within 6 months of the bill being signed into law

Benefits of Pollinator-Friendly Solar Sites

- **Provides foraging habitats** - Monarchs and honeybee populations are in crisis, and loss of habitat is one of the most significant causes. A single 10-acre solar site is equivalent to more than 5,000 6’x12’ backyard pollinator gardens. More than 300 song and game bird species are threatened due to changes in habitat and seasonal conditions.
- **Provides Improved Storm Water Management and Soil** - Compared to gravel or turf-grass, long-rooted native plants filter and channel storm water directly to the aquifer while improving soil organics and helping to prevent area nitrates and phosphorous from reaching waterways.
- **Economic Development** - Demand for growing native ground cover on solar sites will provide employment opportunities for local seed growers and landscape service companies.