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### **Agency of Transportation takes action to protect the Monarch butterfly**

Barre, Vt. – In recognition of Earth Day, the Vermont Agency of Transportation (AOT) today announced that it has joined the effort to protect the Monarch butterfly by enrolling highway right-of-way lands throughout the state in a voluntary nationwide conservation program. The eastern Monarch population has declined by approximately 77% since 1995.

“AOT’s participation in this national program exemplifies the commitment by the Agency and the State of Vermont to protect wildlife and approach all transportation-related work as stewards of our beautiful Green Mountain State,” said AOT Senior Biologist Glenn Gingras.

The nationwide conservation agreement is called the Nationwide Monarch Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances (CCAA) for Energy and Transportation Lands. AOT enrolled 42,534 acres of land into the agreement. This includes 3,403 (8%) “adopted” acres where specific conservation practices will be implemented: conservation mowing, idle lands set aside during rotational mowing, brush removal to create open lands, native seeding, plantings to restore habitat, and conducting pollinator habitat monitoring. Entering into this agreement provides multiple benefits to participants if the species is listed as endangered. The agreement provides assurances that minimize project and other work delays so that daily operations and construction activities can continue seamlessly. Conservation measures will also enhance habitat for other pollinator species as well.

Since 2017, the University of Chicago has partnered with more than 45 energy and transportation organizations to develop the first nationwide CCAA for Energy and Transportation Lands. The Monarch CCAA is a historic and transformational voluntary agreement between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and non-federal transportation and utility organizations to protect the Monarch Butterfly from extinction. In December 2020, the USFWS announced that listing the monarch as endangered or threatened under the Endangered Species Act is warranted but precluded by higher priority listing actions.