ENVIRONMENTAL LAW

Pollinator policies

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Credit: Mark Graf / Alamy Stock Photo

Pollinating insects are essential for agricultural production and manifold ecological functions. However, their populations are declining dramatically the world over, calling for stronger governance. In the absence of internationally agreed goals beyond broader biodiversity initiatives, targeted subnational policies can help us to understand the current state and potential of law to revert pollinator decline.

Damon Hall from University of Missouri and Rebecca Steiner from Saint Louis University, both in the United States, examine the range of recent policy innovations on this topic. Using content analysis methods, they conduct a structured review of 109 US laws passed at subnational level between 2000–2017. Despite not being on par with scientific advances, law-making has evolved alongside increasing concern about pollinators. Passed laws were to improve apicultural standards, pest management and habitats; for research and monitoring; and to raise public awareness. None of these laws were to promote alternatives to agrochemicals or diversify farming systems, both recommended by scientists. Such legislation has particular potential for bottom-up governance, where regulation at smaller administrative scales has boosted the adoption of laws at larger scales, such as at national level and, perhaps in the future, also at the international level.

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