

The Nature Conservancy in Oklahoma again has residents going wild over a license plate design. Three years ago at this time, people voted on bison and prairie-themed designs; this time, itâ€™s six different designs featuring the monarch butterfly. â€œItâ€™s because they are bee-u-tiful,â€• Nature Conservancy spokeswoman Katie Hawk said with a chuckle. Voting started Monday, and by Tuesday afternoon, the tally was growing by roughly 400 votes per hour, Hawk said. Just before 2 p.m., the tally was 3,686. Each participant gets one vote.

â€œThree years ago, we did the bison license plate, and we had 15,000 votes. It was the first time, and you never expect it to happen twice. I was anticipating about a third as much participation this time, but itâ€™s been less than a day and we already have more than 3,000 votes,â€• she said. The bison license plate still is one of the stateâ€™s most popular of its many specialty license plates. Oklahomans have through Sept. 8 to vote online for one of six different license plates created by Oklahoma designers and three slogans to go with the choice of art. The link to vote can be found at [bit.ly/butterflyplates](http://bit.ly/butterflyplates). Tulsa-based Cubic Creative, which designed the winning bison plate in 2016, has two designs in the running this time. The winning design will be announced Sept. 12 and submitted to the Oklahoma Tax Commission. If approved, the plate will be available for advanced sale to the public for 180 days. If 100 plates are sold in that time frame, the plate will go into production. Gov. Kevin Stitt signed Senate Bill 170 in May to authorize creation of the plate to raise awareness about the plight of the monarch, the importance of Oklahoma as a flyway state for the species and the importance of pollinators for agriculture. Three possible slogans for the plates that people can vote for are â€œOkies for Monarchs,â€• â€œSave the Monarchsâ€• or â€œPlant for Pollinators.â€• A portion of the proceeds from the plate will benefit the Nature Conservancyâ€™s efforts in Oklahoma to increase pollinator habitat throughout the state in its role as one of the original co-founders of the Oklahoma Monarch and Pollinator Collaborative, which

involves more than 40 groups. "It's a very important program to us, and we actively incorporate it into all of our outreach programs, as well as conservation stewardship efforts," she said. "It is a great way to connect with people. That conversation about conservation is so important, and with monarchs, it is something everyone can do and it's a great way to help pollinators and help people connect with the natural environment." It's been 18 months since the group, with one initiative informally called Okies for Monarchs, charged ahead with an action plan. Since the program began, 1,803 people have pledged online with Okies for Monarchs to help save monarchs and pollinators, 294 Oklahoma farmers and ranchers have pledged to plant at least 250 square feet of pollinator habitat, 3,200 have signed up for the group's newsletter and collaborative groups have directly engaged 10,500 people through meet-ups, festivals, workshops and conferences, Hawk said. The group's full-day symposium for landowners, landscape designers and gardeners called "Rewilding Oklahoma" from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Wednesday at the Oklahoma City Zoo, she said.

The Okies for Monarchs seed and plant production work group created online pollinator garden and landscape planting guides by region and recently worked with Johnston Seed Co. of Enid to create "Wildflowers for Monarch" seed mixes tailored to each region of the state, she said. Associated efforts had 14 Oklahoma mayors, including Tulsa, sign the National Wildlife Federation Mayors Monarch Pledge, and the Monarch Watch program has boosted the state's total to 477 homes and business with registered pollinator gardens certified as "monarch weigh stations," she said. "The world of conservation, it's not always the most simple of topics," Hawk said. "To have a topic like monarchs and with license plates, which connects with almost every single adult in our state, it is fun. We make so many new contacts and new friends this way." Twitter: @KellyBostian Kelly Bostian 918-581-8357 kelly.bostian@tulsaworld.com Twitter: @KellyBostian