

Beijing adopts CBCGDF's "Let the Wild Grass Grow" suggestions: Introducing wilderness-friendly policies & improving connectivity

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Abstract: The movement of the "Let the Wild Grass Grow" Initiative promoted public awareness and advanced wilderness-friendly policies. The China Biodiversity Conservation and Green Development Foundation (CBCGDF) has advocated for the mainstreaming of biodiversity, particularly to policymakers, through this initiative. Notably, Peking University established China's first "Campus Protected Area" where wild grass is allowed to grow, fallen leaves are not cleared, and insecticides are not used. There's also a positive shift in the mindset of decision-making bodies, with the emergence of more biodiversity-friendly policies. The recently issued guidelines by the Beijing Municipal Bureau of Landscape and Forestry define "natural zones" and emphasize the avoidance of human intervention. These measures reflect Beijing's proactive approach to enhance biodiversity conservation in urban areas.

Key words: Biodiversity, Let the Wild Grass Grow, wilderness-friendly policies, urban development, Beijing, mainstreaming biodiversity conservation

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Generally, an interesting situation in urban development is the simultaneous destruction of biodiversity, such as the mandated removal of wild grass from lawns and gardens in urban areas by landscaping departments, while in city's suburban areas the implementation of "biodiversity conservation" measures, including the establishment of governmental-funded nature reserves. This disregard for biodiversity by landscaping practices has long been overlooked, perpetuating a distorted aesthetic perspective under industrial civilization. Since 2016, the China Biodiversity Conservation and Green Development Foundation (CBCGDF) has been advocating for the



mainstreaming of biodiversity, particularly to policymakers and bodies, through its initiative “Let the Wild Grass Grow”.

Wild grass is an integral part of biodiversity, and promoting its growth through the “Let the Wild Grass Grow” initiative is a crucial measure for conducting biodiversity conservation in urban areas. In urban environments, the presence of wild grass contributes to the overall diversity of plant species and provides habitats for a range of insects and small animals. By allowing wild grass to flourish, we create a more natural and balanced ecosystem within cities.

The “Let the Wild Grass Grow” initiative recognizes the importance of preserving and restoring biodiversity in urban landscapes. It calls for a shift in traditional landscaping practices that prioritize manicured lawns and monoculture plantings, which often limit the variety of plant and animal species. Instead, the initiative advocates for embracing the natural beauty of wild grass and creating spaces where it can thrive.

By letting wild grass grow, we provide food and shelter for pollinators like bees and butterflies, supporting their populations and promoting essential ecological processes. Moreover, wild grasses contribute to soil health and erosion control, reducing the negative environmental impacts associated with excessive pesticide use and soil disturbance.

Implementing the “Let the Wild Grass Grow” initiative requires a change in mindset and approaches to urban planning and landscape management. It encourages the integration of natural elements and the creation of green spaces that prioritize biodiversity conservation. This can be achieved through the preservation of existing wild grass areas, the incorporation of native grass species, and the reduction of chemical inputs in landscaping practices.

An additional important aspect of the “Let the Wild Grass Grow” initiative is its cost-saving potential, leading to reduced financial expenditure in urban management. By recognizing the value of wild grass, both in terms of biodiversity and aesthetics,



cities can significantly improve the efficiency of their operational funds. Traditional landscaping practices often involve intensive maintenance of lawns and gardens, including regular mowing, fertilization, and pesticide applications. These activities require substantial financial resources to cover labor, equipment, and chemical inputs. In contrast, the “Let the Wild Grass Grow” approach promotes a more natural and self-sustaining ecosystem, reducing the need for excessive maintenance and associated costs. By allowing wild grass to grow, cities can save on expenses related to lawn maintenance significantly, such as labor costs for mowing and trimming. Additionally, the reduced reliance on chemical inputs, such as pesticides and fertilizers, leads to cost savings and decreases the potential negative impacts on the environment and human health.

With an increasing number of public education and awareness including the CBCGDF’s advocacy, the importance of “letting wild grass grow” is being recognized. For instance, in 2018, Peking University, one of China’s most prestigious universities, pioneered and established the country’s first “Campus Protected Area”. In certain parts of the university, wild grass is allowed to grow, fallen leaves are not cleared, and insecticides are not used. (In contrast, such “letting the wild grass grow” practices are not permitted in other areas managed by landscaping departments and may result in fines.)

Through long-term and persistent efforts, dissemination, and policy recommendations, it is great to see an increasing shift in the mindset of decision-making bodies. This change is accompanied by the emergence of more “biodiversity-friendly” policies.

Another example was that on May 6, 2022, the Beijing Municipal Bureau of Landscape and Forestry issued the “Technical Guidelines for Natural Zone Creation and Management (Trial)” (hereafter referred as Guidelines) which explicitly defines the concept of “natural zones” as larger and well-eco-connected areas preserved within urban forests and green spaces. These natural zones emphasize the avoidance of human intervention and promote natural succession. It is worth noting that the Beijing



Municipal Bureau of Landscape and Forestry is responsible for urban and rural greening as well as administrative management related to forestry.

Media reports indicate that Beijing's mountainous areas already have a forest coverage rate of 67.07%, forming a nice ecological barrier. However, there is still a lack of adequately protected spaces for biodiversity within urban and plain areas. The construction of "natural zones" can be seen as Beijing's proactive measure to supplement and enhance biodiversity conservation spaces in urban and plain areas.

Regarding Management Measures for Natural Zones: the Guidelines specify several management measures for natural zones, including the avoidance of pruning and artificial watering, the prohibition of clearing dead branches and leaves, the prohibition of feeding wild animals, the prevention of filling tree cavities to avoid disrupting animal nesting and habitat, and the strict prohibition of introducing non-native species into water bodies. In general, artificial intervention in tree management should be avoided. However, in cases of extensive pest infestation or extreme weather conditions leading to drought, measures such as biological pest control or pruning may be employed to mitigate damage, with watering permitted as necessary.

The "Let the Wild Grass Grow" Initiative:

The "Let the Wild Grass Grow" initiative, launched by the CBCGDF in 2016, advocates for nature-based solutions (NbS) in urban ecological construction and landscaping. The CBCGDF has long been calling for attention to the problems arising from the widespread use of artificial lawns, which contribute to monotonous biodiversity and the decline of bird populations due to extensive pesticide spraying. The initiative proposes an approach that respects nature and aligns with the principles of harmonious coexistence between humans and nature to guide urban ecological planning and restore urban biodiversity.

The recent release of these guidelines is undoubtedly a positive sign. Beijing's adoption of the thoughts of "Let the Wild Grass Grow" initiative reflects a growing awareness of the importance of preserving biodiversity in urban areas. By allowing



wild flowers and grasses to thrive, cities can enrich their green spaces and contribute to the recovery of insect biodiversity. This progress showcases Beijing's firm commitment to incorporating natural principles and fostering a harmonious coexistence between humans and nature in urban planning.



