

JOHNSON COUNTY INTEGRATED ROADSIDE VEGETATION MANAGEMENT PLAN

I. Objectives: It is declared to be in the general public welfare of Johnson County, Iowa and a Secondary Roads purpose for the vegetation of Johnson County's roadsides to be preserved, planted, and maintained to be safe, visually interesting, ecologically integrated, and useful for many purposes. The Johnson County Secondary Road Department shall provide an Integrated Roadside Vegetation Management plan and program which shall be designed to accomplish all of the following:

- a. Maintain a safe travel environment.
- b. Serve a variety of public purposes including erosion control, wildlife habitat, climate control, scenic qualities, weed control, utility easements, recreation uses, and sustenance of water quality.
- c. Be based on a systematic assessment of conditions existing in roadsides, preservation of valuable vegetation and habitats in the area, and the adoption of a comprehensive plan and strategies for cost-effective maintenance and vegetation planting.
- d. Emphasize the establishment of adaptable and long-lived vegetation, often native species, matched to the unique environment found in and adjacent to the roadside.
- e. Incorporate integrated management practices for the long-term control of damaging insect populations, weeds, and invader plant species.
- f. Build upon a public education program allowing input from adjacent landowners and the general public.
- g. Accelerate efforts toward increasing and expanding the effectiveness of plantings to reduce wind-induced and water-induced soil erosion and to increase deposition of snow in desired locations.

II. Integrated roadside vegetation management technical advisory committee.

- a. Upon approval by the Johnson County Board of Supervisors, the County Engineer shall appoint members to an integrated roadside vegetation management technical advisory committee which is created to provide advice on the development and implementation of a county-wide integrated roadside vegetation management plan and program and related projects. The Roadside Vegetation Manager shall report annually in January to the Board of Supervisors regarding the activities of the committee. Activities of the committee may include, but are not limited to, providing advice and assistance in the following areas:
 - 1) Research efforts
 - 2) Demonstration projects
 - 3) Education and orientation efforts for property owners, public officials, and the general public
 - 4) Activities of the integrated roadside vegetation manager
 - 5) Reviewing applications for funding assistance
 - 6) Securing funding for research and demonstrations
 - 7) Liaison with other organizations for integrated roadside vegetation management purposes
- b. The County Engineer may appoint any number of persons to the committee and will consider representation from the following:

- 1) One member representing the utility industry
- 2) One member from a University or College in Johnson County
- 3) One member representing county government that shall be a current Johnson County Employee
- 4) Two members representing the private sector including community interest groups
- 5) One member representing soil conservation interests
- 6) One member representing the department of natural resources or the Corps of Engineers
- 7) One member representing the Johnson County Conservation Board

Members of the committee shall serve without compensation, but may be reimbursed for expenses as approved by the County Engineer.

No more than a simple majority of the members of the committee shall be of the same gender as provided in section 69.16A of the Code of Iowa. The County Engineer may appoint the chair of the committee and shall establish a minimum schedule of meetings for the committee.

III. Integrated roadside vegetation manager: The integrated roadside vegetation manager shall administer the Johnson County Secondary Roads department's integrated roadside vegetation management plan and program. The department may create the position of integrated roadside vegetation manager within the department or may contract for the services of the manager. Duties of the manager include, but are not limited to, the following:

- a. Conducting education and awareness programs.
- b. Providing technical advice to the County Engineer and the Secondary Roads Department, the County Conservation Board and other cities within Johnson County.
- c. Conducting demonstration projects.
- d. Coordinating inventory and implementation activities.
- e. Providing assistance to community-based groups in Johnson County for undertaking community entryway projects.
- f. Being a clearinghouse for information from Johnson County projects as well as from other counties and states.
- g. Periodically distributing information related to integrated roadside vegetation management.
- h. General coordination research efforts.
- i. Other duties assigned by the County Engineer.

IV. Education Programs: The Secondary Road Department shall develop educational programs and provide educational materials for the general public, landowners, governmental employees, and board members as part of its program for integrated roadside vegetation management. The educational program shall provide all of the following:

- a. The development of public service announcements and television programs about the importance of roadside vegetation in Iowa.
- b. The expansion of existing training sessions and educational curriculum materials for county weed commissioners, government contract sprayers, maintenance staff, and others to include coverage of integrated roadside management topics such as basic plant species identification, vegetation preservation, vegetation inventory techniques, vegetation management and planning procedures, planting techniques, maintenance, communication, and public relations. County and municipal engineers, public works

staffs, planning and zoning representatives, parks and habitat managers, and others should be encouraged to participate.

- c. The conducting of statewide and regional conferences and seminars about integrated roadside vegetation management, community entryways, scenic values of land adjoining roadside, and other topics relating to roadside vegetation.
- d. The preparation, display, and distribution of a variety of public relations material, in order to better inform and educate the traveling public on roadside vegetation management activities. The public relations material shall inform motorists of a variety of roadside vegetation issues including all of the following:
 - 1. Benefits of various types of roadside vegetation.
 - 2. Long-term results expected from planting and maintenance practices.
 - 3. Purposes for short-term disturbances in the roadside landscapes.
 - 4. Interesting aspects of the Iowa landscape and individual landscape regions.
 - 5. Other aspects relating to wildlife and soil erosion.
- e. Preparation and distribution of educational material designed to inform adjoining property owners, farm operators, and others of the importance of roadside vegetation and their responsibilities of proper stewardship of that vegetation resource.

V. *Research and demonstration projects:* The Secondary Road Department, as part of its plan to provide integrated roadside vegetation management, shall conduct research and feasibility studies including demonstration projects of different kinds at a variety of locations around the County. The research and feasibility studies may be conducted in, but are not limited to, any of the following areas:

- a. Cost effectiveness or comparison of planting, establishing and maintaining alternative or warm-season, native grass and forb roadside vegetation and traditional cool-season nonnative vegetation.
- b. Identification of the relationship that roadsides and roadside vegetation have to maintaining water quality, through drainage wells, sediment and pollutant collection and filtration, and other means.
- c. Impacts of burning as an alternative vegetation management tool on all categories of roads.
- d. Techniques for more quickly establishing erosion control and permanent vegetative cover on recently disturbed ground as well as interplanting native species in existing vegetative cover.
- e. Effectiveness of techniques for reduced or selected use of herbicides to control weeds.
- f. Identification of cross section and slope steepness design standards which provide for motorist safety as well as for improved establishment, maintenance, and replacement of different types of vegetation.
- g. Identification of a uniform inventory and assessment technique which could be used by many counties in establishing integrated roadside management programs.
- h. Equipment innovations for seeding and harvesting grasses in different terrain settings, roadway ditches, and fore-slopes and back-slopes.
- i. Identification of the perceptions of motorist and landowners to various types of roadside vegetation and configuration of plantings.
- j. Market or economic feasibility studies for native seed, forb, and woody plant production and propagation.
- k. Impacts of vegetation modifications on increasing or decreasing wildlife populations in rural and urban areas.

- l. Effects of vegetation on the number and location of wildlife road-kills in rural and urban areas.
- m. Costs to the public for improper off-site resource management adjacent to roadsides.
- n. Advantages, disadvantages, and techniques of establishing pedestrian access adjacent to highways and their impacts on vegetation management.
- o. Identification of alternative techniques for snow catchment on farmland adjacent to roadsides.

VI. Gateways Program: The Secondary Road Department shall develop a gateways program to provide meaningful visual impacts including major new plantings at the important highway entry points to Johnson County and its communities. Substantial and distinctive plantings shall also be designed and installed at these points. Creative and artistic design solutions shall be sought for these improvements. Communications about these projects shall be provided to local groups in order to build community involvement, support, and understanding of their importance. Consideration shall be given to a requirement that gateways projects produce a local match or contribution toward the overall project cost.

VII. Vegetation Inventories and Strategies:

- a. The Secondary Road Department shall coordinate and compile integrated roadside vegetation inventories, classification systems, plans, and implementation strategies for roadsides. Areas of increased program and project emphasis may include, but are not limited to, all of the following:
 - 1. Additional development and funding of state gateways projects.
 - 2. Accelerated replacement of dead and unhealthy plants with native and hardy trees and shrubs.
 - 3. Special interest plantings at selected highly visible locations along Johnson County Secondary Roads.
 - 4. Pilot and demonstration projects.
 - 5. Additional snow and erosion control plantings.
- b. The Secondary Road Department shall coordinate and compile a reconnaissance of lands to develop an inventory of sites having the potential of being harvested for native grass, forb, and woody plant material seed and growing stock. Highway right-of-ways, parks and recreation areas, converted railroad right-of-ways, and other types of public property shall be surveyed and documented for seed source potential. Sites volunteered by private organizations may also be included in the inventory. Inventory information shall be made available to state agencies' staff, county engineers, county conservation board directors and others.