

314.22 Integrated roadside vegetation management.

1. *Objectives.* It is declared to be in the general public welfare of Iowa and a highway purpose for the vegetation of Iowa's roadsides to be preserved, planted, and maintained to be safe, visually interesting, ecologically integrated, and useful for many purposes. The state department of transportation 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.

h. Incorporate integrated roadside vegetation management with other state agency planning and program activities including the recreation trails program, scenic highways, open space, and tourism development efforts. Agencies should annually report their progress in this area to the general assembly.

2. *Counties may adopt plans.* A county may adopt an integrated roadside vegetation management plan consistent with the integrated roadside vegetation management plan adopted by the department under subsection 1.

3. *Integrated roadside vegetation management technical advisory committee.*

a. The director of the department 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 statewide integrated roadside vegetation management plan and program and related projects. The department shall report annually in January to the general assembly regarding its activities and those 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 management coordinator for integrated roadside vegetation management.

(5) Reviewing applications for funding assistance.

(6) Securing funding for research and demonstrations.

(7) Determining needs for revising the state weed law and other applicable Code sections.

(8) Liaison with the Iowa state association of counties, the Iowa league of cities, and other organizations for integrated roadside vegetation management purposes.

b. The director may appoint any number of persons to the committee but, at a minimum, the committee shall consist of all of the following:

(1) One member representing the utility industry.

(2) One member from the Iowa academy of sciences.

(3) One member representing county government.

(4) One member representing city government.

(5) Two members representing the private sector including community interest groups.

(6) One member representing soil conservation interests.

(7) One member representing the department of natural resources.

(8) One member representing county conservation boards.

Members of the committee shall serve without compensation, but may be reimbursed for allowable expenses from the living roadway trust fund created under section 314.21. No more than a simple majority of the members of the committee shall be of the same gender as provided in section 69.16A. The director of the department shall appoint the chair of the committee and shall establish a minimum schedule of meetings for the committee.

4. *Integrated roadside vegetation management coordinator.* The integrated roadside vegetation management coordinator shall administer the department's integrated roadside vegetation management plan and program. The department may create the position of integrated roadside vegetation management coordinator within the department or may contract for the services of the coordinator. The duties of the coordinator include, but are not limited to, the following:

a. Conducting education and awareness programs.

b. Providing technical advice to the department and the department of natural resources, counties, and cities.

c. Conducting demonstration projects.

d. Coordinating inventory and implementation activities.

e. Providing assistance to local community-based groups for undertaking community entryway projects.

f. Being a clearinghouse for information from Iowa projects as well as from other states.

g. Periodically distributing information related to integrated roadside vegetation management.

h. General coordination of research efforts.

i. Other duties assigned by the director of transportation.

5. *Education programs.* The 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 roadsides, 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.

6. *Research and demonstration projects.* The 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 state. 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 difficult terrain settings, roadway ditches, and fore-slopes and back-slopes.
- i. Identification of the perceptions of motorists 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.

7. *Gateways program.* The department shall develop a gateways program to provide meaningful visual impacts including major new plantings at the important highway entry points to the state 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.

8. *Vegetation inventories and strategies.*

a. The 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 primary and interstate highways.

(4) Pilot and demonstration projects.

(5) Additional snow and erosion control plantings.

(6) Welcome center and rest area plantings with native and aesthetically interesting species to create mini-arboretums around the state.

b. The 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, state board of regents' property, lands owned by counties, 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' staffs, county engineers, county conservation board directors, and others.

89 Acts, ch 246, §6; 95 Acts, ch 3, §2