Washington County
Integrated Roadside Vegetation Management
General Plan

Section 314.22 of the Iowa Code, Integrated Roadside Vegetation Management states: *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.*

Definition:

Integrated Roadside Vegetation Management (IRVM)

A long term approach to vegetation management that:

1. Systematically evaluates each area to be managed.
2. Determines which plant communities best fit the area.
3. Develops procedures that will encourage, enhance or re-establish native plant communities.
4. Provides self-sustaining, diversified, visually interesting vegetation.
5. Keeps safety and an improved environment as priorities.
6. Utilizes the most beneficial methods to prevent or correct undesirable situations caused by disturbance or less than optimum vegetative ground cover.

INTRODUCTION:

The prime purpose of road corridors is to transport people and goods safely and efficiently from one location to another. The prime purpose of roadside vegetation is to hold soil in place without creating hazards.

Washington County's vegetation management goals must meet certain safety and functional requirements before aesthetic, recreational or economic considerations can be addressed. These are to maintain a clear zone recovery area, meet minimal sight distance requirements and provide for erosion control. We are also required by Iowa law to mow or otherwise control noxious weeds. Through the use of IRVM, we should be able to meet the prime purposes, provide a safe corridor for travel and address other desirable uses for roadside vegetation.

The goals of the Integrated Roadside Vegetation Management Plan are to:

1. Preserve and provide safe, functional and environmentally improved corridors of travel throughout the county.

2. Utilize a long-term integrated management program that promotes desirable, self-sustaining plant communities. Encourage those plant communities that are native to Iowa through preservation and re-establish whenever practical.

3. Make more efficient and effective use of chemicals as a control method of undesirable plants.

4. Enhance the scenic qualities of the roadsides and their value as roadside habitat.

PROCEDURES FOR INTEGRATED ROADSIDE VEGETATION MANAGEMENT:

1. Inventory the sites to be managed.

2. List the existing areas of desirable vegetation as well as those that need improvement.

3. Determine the appropriate management methods needed.

4. Determine the best time to implement management procedures and see that they are accomplished at that time. Temporary procedures may be needed to preserve an area before permanent procedures can be utilized.

INTEGRATED ROADSIDE VEGETATION MANAGEMENT METHODS

Integrated vegetation management includes the use of cultural, mechanical, biological and chemical practices. Each location must be evaluated to determine the method to be used. One or more of the following will be used:

1. Cultural Methods.

   Cultural controls can be achieved through the introduction and management of desirable plants to control noxious weeds and other undesirable plants. Many native plants are poor competitors in their early stages of growth, but once established they crowd out most other plants with minimum management.

   Controlled burning is recognized as a valuable tool for enhancing and maintaining native plant communities. At the same time Washington County recognizes the potential for creating possible problems when burning roadside vegetation. Therefore areas identified in the roadside inventory as showing potential for prairie restoration will be burned only under the safest atmospheric conditions by personnel trained and certified in the use of fire.

2. Mechanical Methods.

   This involves anything from tractor mowers for cutting down weeds and managing road shoulders to pruning shears, chainsaws and boom mowers for controlling brush and maintaining the clear zone.

3. Biological Methods.

   This involves the use of animals, insects, bacteria or virus to control plant growth. Natural enemies of noxious weeds could possibly be used in the ROW if necessary. Further research will be needed on other possible biological controls before the county will recommend them.

4. Chemicals Methods.

   Selection of chemicals to be used shall be based on their label constraints and residual effects on the environment. They will be monitored to document their effectiveness and impacts upon target and non-target species.

   There are several new herbicides with very specific effects on specific plant species. These herbicides can be valuable tools for controlling undesirable plants on a short-term basis.

EDUCATION AND INFORMATION

As part of the county's IRVM plan, it will:

1. Develop a public awareness campaign to gain support for integrated management through media, established organizations, seminars and brochures.
2. Obtain educational and informational material on IRVM to be presented in seminars and distributed to adjacent landowners, the general public, consultants and contractors.

3. Provide guidelines and directives for contractors and others who seed, plant and maintain roadsides.
4. Prepare and distribute instructions on preservation of desirable areas and treatment of areas that need improvement.
5. Gather, develop and distribute information with other jurisdictions; seek and share information with other counties.
6. Encourage research in all aspects of IRVM, ie; road design for improving IRVM, planting methods, management practices, seed sources, seeding rates, seed mixes, planting materials etc.
7. Encourage use of native seeds and plant materials native to Iowa.

This is a flexible plan that requires common sense interpretations with changes as necessary to fit the ever-changing complex circumstances realized in roadside vegetation management.

Jack L. Dillon, Chairperson
Washington County Board of Supervisors

7-18-06
Date

David R. Patterson
Washington County Engineer

7-18-06
Date