Iowa Roadside Management
Successes and what could be better

Joy Williams,
Vegetation Management Agronomist
Roadside Development Section
Office of Design
Ames IA 50010
515-233-7729
joy.williams@dot.iowa.gov
• Hired in Maintenance as a program manager
  – Facilitate Roadside Coordinator Program
  – Conduct pesticide applicator training for > 500 in-house equipment operators
  – Evaluate feasibility of contract spraying and mowing
• Moved to Roadside Development Section in Design in a major reorganization 2002
  – Now just “Technical resource as requested”
  – Work with Landscaping project designers
  – Herbicide specialist (select products, evaluate bids, etc.)
  – Claim investigation for anything vegetation related
  – Single point state contact for anything weed and brush
  – Haying policy and mowing law
  – Tree and brush control (emerald ash borer, etc.)
  – The “weed and wildflower lady”
Responsible for interstates and primary highways

- 9,378 miles of roadway and ramps
- 230,00 plus acres of right-of-way
Iowa’s Roadside Program

• County programs
• History of the Iowa Roadside Program
• Burning to promote native vegetation
• Living Roadway Trust Fund
• Other Funding Sources
• Landscaping and revegetation projects (kill out brome/fescue with glyphosate, seed to natives)
• Decreased DOT workforce, other priorities
• Contracting
• Farmer Haying
County Roadside Programs
Under Secondary Roads or Co. Conservation Dept.
County Roadside Programs – Huge Success

- Chris Henze – Johnson Co. Roadside Manager
  – Iowa City and surrounding area
- Rob Roman – Linn Co. Roadside Manager
  – Cedar Rapids/Marion area

- Kristine Nemic – Roadside Program Coordinator
  – University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls
  – Tallgrass Prairie Center
### Difference between County and State

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>DOT</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Hires people with natural resource degrees, primary job is vegetation management</td>
<td>• Hires equipment operators whose primary job is snow and ice control, edge rut repair, sealing, construction inspection.</td>
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<td>• Job description very inclusive about grant writing, budget management, people skills</td>
<td>• Job description favors people with agriculture Coop spraying background</td>
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<td>• Report to County Engineer or Conservation Director, ultimately to elected Board of Supervisors</td>
<td>• Report to 3 layers, ultimately District Engineer (at will position, Governor can fire without cause)</td>
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<td>• Supervises staff and seasonal laborers, technical support from UNI Roadside Program,</td>
<td>• Technical support – resource “as requested,” no budget</td>
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<td>• Funding supplemented by grants from DOT (LRTF, TAP)</td>
<td>• Saddled with administering grants and promotion of native vegetation</td>
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Funding Sources

County
- Operation budget from property tax
- Grants from Living Roadway Trust fund
- Seed from Transportation and Grant administered by UNI Roadside Program at Tallgrass Prairie Center

DOT
- DOT/DNR fund
  - 3 million. Cut back 1 million.
  - Use for landscaping projects
  - Herbicide before project and up to 4 years after letting for establishment purposes
- Project funds
- Very little use of LRTF grants but saddled with administration.
Living Roadway Trust Fund LRTF
Key to success of County programs

• 3% of REAP funds (20 million Resource Enhancement and Protection Act, never fully funded)
• Tax on utility easements
• Road Use Fuel funds
• This year - $884,000 available
• Formula splits for Statewide, County and Municipality
LRTF Grants fund

- UNI Roadside Program Coordinator position
- Promotional and educational materials
  - Posters
  - Books,
- Research and demonstration
- Equipment
  - Seeders
  - Burn equipment
  - Sprayers
  - Computer
- Inventory
  - GPS equipment and software
Why doesn’t the DOT burn?

Iowa county roadside managers burn and get supplies through LRTF
Minnesota DOT burns

Some people just go ahead and burn along state highways without permission
DOT does not burn liability, insurance and willingness to take safety risks

- Chapter 669 State Tort Claims
  - No cap on state’s liability in Iowa
    - There is cap on state’s liability in Minnesota
    - If an accident occurred from smoke on the road, DOT could be sued for unlimited amount.

- Iowa DOT is self-insured.
- Contractors required to be bonded and carry high insurance coverage.
- There is risk in everything the DOT does. Need to establish cost/benefit ratio, expertise and experience before convincing.
- Current Zero Fatality initiative
DOT has allow individuals to burn by permit through an “Application to Perform Work Within State Highway Right-a-way” agreement that we use with utility companies.

Liability Stipulation:

“The applicant shall (defend), indemnify and save harmless the State of Iowa, its agencies, and employees, from any and all causes or actions, suits at law or in equity, for losses, damages, claims, or demands, and from any and all liability and expense of whatever nature, arising out of or in connection with the applicant’s use or occupancy of the public highway.”
So why is the DOT seeding native grasses and wildflowers if it cannot burn? Revegetation Projects Native grasses + wildflower mix – 40 plus species
Use haying and mowing as poor substitute for burning
2010 Mowing Legislation
Prompted by low pheasant population
2010 Mowing Law

• Prohibits mowing and haying until after July 15 on primary and secondary roads

• Intended to protect bird habitat during nesting season

• Several exceptions for needed mowing
Mowing Law - Exception For visibility and safety concerns
Exception - To establish control of damaging insect populations, noxious weeds, and invasive plant species (wild parsnip, etc.) (Weed Patch Mowing)
Roadside haying – not a Mowing Law exception
Not allowed until after July 15, and only by permit
Iowa DOT
Harvesting and Mowing Permit Application (2008)

- Haying
- Mowing
- Seed Collecting
- Cut flowers
- Berry and fruit harvesting
- Dried plants
- Cattail tubers
- Wood
- Any Plant Material
Hungarian Partridge in Grundy Co. IA 175 where farmer obtained hay permit and delayed haying until after July 15
Native bees
DOT native grass and wildflower seeding

53,091 acres Total
- 37,391 acres erosion control
  (after new construction)
- 15,700 acres revegetation
  (kill out existing brome/fescue and reseed to natives)
Existing vegetation first killed out with glyphosate herbicide, then reseeded.
Mow first 2 years - complaints about weeds and complaints about mowing wildflowers
Re-vegetation projects: Controversial

- Cost
- Killing out “perfectly good” vegetation
- Weedy
- Viewed as taking roadsides out of hay production
DOT native grass and wildflower seed purchases

• Supported development of the native seed industry in Iowa
• Made native forb seed more available
• Decreased prices for native seed
• Provided corridors of habitat for wildlife, most importantly the insects that depend on the native plants, although they have gotten the hype until public interest in pollinators.
Landscaping Projects recently in GIS database ( revegetation and tree and shrub plantings)
DOT roadsides with native vegetation
Roadside Prairie Remnant, U.S. 30
Greene Co. East of Grand Junction
Long term strategy: establish healthy, adapted vegetation, diverse vegetation that is appropriate for the site and good habitat
Workforce Changes

2005 to 2015

• 26% drop in number of Maintenance employees available for summer work
  – 2005 – 982 Equipment Operators

• 120 Maintenance employees (Highway Technicians) fill in as construction inspectors during the off-winter season

• Many districts are contracting spraying
Advice from “oh it could have been so much better if only if...”

• Don’t neglect the remnant vegetation in zeal to do restoration plantings! Just back off on mowing.!
• Funding source is key, but grant-based through DOT has its drawbacks.
• Hire the right people, empower them and treat them as professionals.
• Involve all from beginning, including conservationists and adjacent landowners.
• Start slow - iron out contract specifications and seed specs. show success before going big.
• Decide on seed specs and work with seed industry.
• Ensure consistency in changing administration and politics.
• Communicate with staff!
Statewide Contact

joy.williams@dot.iowa.gov
515-233-7729

• To find out who to contact in DOT
• To relay complaints or concerns
• So there is a statewide record of complaints
• To get a hold of someone who cares about native grasses and wildflowers and the value of roadsides as habitat.