

# Crossroads

Summer 1996



TRANSPORTATION Information Center

University of Wisconsin–Madison

## Roadside maintenance—cutting can become a “hot” issue

Maintaining roadside vegetation can sometimes take the balancing skill of a high-wire acrobat. Neighboring landowners and others may have very different ideas about what’s desirable. Safety has to be balanced with visual attractiveness; cost and environmental concerns must be addressed. Cutting trees on the public’s favorite “shady lane” or letting noxious weeds flourish next to farm fields can produce a public relations disaster; so can a car crashing into a roadside hazard.

Experts and those who have been through it advise: plan ahead and publicize.

### First: specific policies

“You can head off problems if you have specific policies in place,” says Dick Stark a landscape architect and WisDOT’s roadside maintenance specialist. He was a panelist on the T.I.C.’s program **Maintaining and Controlling Roadside Vegetation**, offered by satellite last February. Stark advises that the goal should be to have a policy that is so thorough and so soundly reasoned that new staff and administrators can, and will, carry it out.

“The policy should describe the what, how, when and where of specific actions,” Stark says. Document the whys too, even if you choose not to include them in written policies. Stark and other WisDOT staff are writing a comprehensive vegetation management plan for state highways.

Changes to the new state mowing policy took discussion and compromise. “We had to address conflicts between drainage and environmental concerns,” Stark says. A clean, completely mowed ditch bottom will carry four times as much water, quickly getting it away from the road’s subsoil. However, fast-moving water can damage streams and ponds with pollutants and sediment. It may also cause erosion and flooding. With taller vegetation in the ditch bottom, water flow slows down and sediments drop out. Ditches with a minimum slope should be maintained so they provide continuous and effective drainage.

“We’ve decided that wherever possible, road edges will be mowed and the mow line will be hidden in the ditch-line,” Stark says. This protects the safety and comfort of motorists, balances drainage with water quality concerns, and also takes the roadside’s visual qualities into account.



*Sometimes safety and scenic beauty conflict on roadsides. Experts say you can manage for both.*

### Safe roads for motorists

A significant number of crashes in Wisconsin involve a single vehicle leaving the road and hitting a fixed object. Having a “clear zone” in the roadside is a recommended way to improve safety. Clear zones for state highways may be 20 to 30 feet wide. The size for other roads depends on traffic speed and volume and the topography of the roadside. Trees larger than four inches in diameter and other obstacles should not be in the clear zone, but removing them may be controversial or unreasonably expensive.

Address the difficulty by individualizing your approach. “Start by identifying high hazard areas. Look for narrow pavements with hills, curves, and rows of

*Continued on page 7*

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## Idea Exchange

### Sign repairs get step up

Green County's patrolmen are finding it easier to replace road signs thanks to an idea from patrolman Alan King. A small step welded to back of the side wing plow puts the worker at just the right height. The step is much more stable than ladders on the sloping ground along roads and the worker's hands are free to easily replace the sign. The 12 x 18 inch step grid costs about \$35 to fabricate from non-slip floor grating.



"We feel these steps have helped us continue to be effective with one-person sign replacements and, more importantly, made them safer operations," says Green County General Superintendent, Jeff Wunschel.

For more information contact Jeff Wunschel, Green County Highway Department, 608/328-9411.

### Spray pothole repair update

A Wisconsin business is patching cracks and potholes using the spray injection method we described in the spring '96 **Crossroads**. The equipment propels chips and asphalt at 65 mph which produces a 94% compaction, according to Keven Haser of Fahrner Asphalt Sealers, Inc., Plover, Wisc.

"It's especially effective for potholes on hills," says Haser. They also use the system to prepare and repair chip sealed roads, and to fix surfaces where cracks have caused the road to sink or cup. The injected material fills and levels the area.

Instead of just patching, the technique appears to produce permanent repairs. This method was developed by the federal Strategic Highway Research Program (SHRP).

Fahrner's pricing for repair projects is based on the costs of stone and asphalt used plus \$125 per hour for the two operators and the machine. There is a 10 hour minimum.

For more information contact Fahrner Asphalt Sealers, Inc., Waunakee, Wisc. at 800/898-2102. The T.I.C. presents this information as a service to readers. No endorsement is implied. We welcome information from other businesses or agencies offering comparable services. Call at 800/442-4615 or fax at 608/263-3160 (use the form on page 7).

### Counties report on new spreaders

Last fall counties put 103 zero-velocity spreaders with prewetting systems into service as part of the WisDOT Winter Maintenance Initiative. Under the program, every Wisconsin county received at least one new piece of equipment for winter maintenance of state and federal roads. The zero-velocity spreaders propel salt backwards at the same speed that the truck is traveling forward. As a result, deicing material effectively is at a standstill relative to the road surface (it has a velocity of zero).

There were the usual problems with the new equipment: plugging of augers, hose breaks, and equipment calibrations. Some counties modified connections and found ways to help resolve the problems. Tom Lorfeld of WisDOT's Maintenance Office is surveying counties on equipment performance and preferences.

Many counties reported increased efficiency and effectiveness from using the new equipment. Patrolmen could salt at speeds of 35-40 mph compared to the 20-25 mph maximum with ordinary auger/spinner combinations. Directional controls permit them to salt the high sides of curves without having to drive on the shoulders.

According to research, pre-wetting salt saves money and makes roads safer through quicker salt action. When salt was pre-wetted with liquid sodium chloride, 40% remained on the roadway after 1000 vehicle passes at 55 mph, compared to only 10% of dry salt applied at the same rate. Salt pre-wetted with calcium chloride and applied under the same conditions had a 50% retention rate.

The WisDOT Winter Equipment Committee will work through the summer to plan for '96-'97. At their May meeting the committee agreed to order several mobile pavement temperature sensors. (See Winter '96 **Crossroads** page 2 for a description.) These should help supervisors more quickly and easily determine what are the effective de-icing levels and chemicals they should be using.

Some information in this article is adapted from stories in the January and March issues of **Highway Maintenance Matters**, a newsletter of the WisDOT Office of Highway Maintenance.

### Crossroads

A newsletter providing information on roads and bridges to local officials, published quarterly by the Transportation Information Center, located at the UW-Madison, Dept. of Engineering Professional Development, 432 N. Lake St., Madison, WI 53706. Phone: 800/442-4615. Fax: 608/263-3160.

Don Walker ..... Director  
Lynn Entine, Lynn Entine Writing & Editing ..... Writer & Editor  
Susan Kummer, Artifax ..... Graphic Artist  
Mercy Ranum ..... Program Assistant

## Metrication Clearinghouse offers help

AASHTO, the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Organizations, has set up a Metrication Clearinghouse to help supply information to local government officials. It is housed at the Texas Transportation Institute in College Station, Texas.

Local officials are invited to take advantage of information in the Clearinghouse's databases. Topics covered include transportation-related metric issues, metrication publications, metric standards, metric conferences, and metric contacts.

There is a World Wide Web site:

<http://tti.tamu.edu/metric> or you could call at 409/845-5770, fax at 409/845-9848, or e-mail at [amenefee@tamu.edu](mailto:amenefee@tamu.edu)

For a listing of metric publications and other resources available from the Wisconsin DOT call Shelly Carney at 608/267-0763.



## New wage laws

Daily overtime requirements for work performed on public works projects changed recently when Governor Thompson signed a new wage law. As of April 30, 1996, people can work four 10-hour days before overtime is required. Time and one-half will also be required for Saturdays, Sundays and six selected holidays. Several other changes in the new bill also took effect at the same time.

Contracting agencies now must post "white sheets" with prevailing wage rates in at least one conspicuous and easily accessible place on the site of the project. A local governmental unit may post them at a place normally used to post public notices if there is no common site on the project. This formerly was the contractor's responsibility. These requirements apply to projects which cost at least \$150,000 when more than one trade is required to complete the job and \$30,000 when at least 85% of the job can be done by one trade.

"Change has been badly needed," says Pat Schultz, lead investigator at DILHR's construction wage standards section. "These laws were instituted in the 1930s and haven't been updated since." The laws will affect all public works construction.

### Prevailing rates will be more realistic

Starting January 1, 1997, the Department of Industry Labor and Human Relations (DILHR) will begin setting prevailing wage rates for each county using a new method and basing rates on annual surveys. These changes will now also apply to local highway, street, and bridge work.

"I think we'll see a major change in wage rates in less populated counties," says Schultz. "Under the old method we used the bargained wage rates to set prevailing rates when no other information was available. The new rates will be more realistic."

There will be an annual survey of every Wisconsin employer in construction and related industries. Then, under a new formula, the rate paid for more than 50% of the hours worked in a trade becomes the prevailing rate. If no rate has more than 50% of the hours, then the new rate is determined by a weighted average of the top 51% of wages paid on private sector work in the county.

The details of the new law were worked out with several focus groups which included representatives from employers' associations, unions, municipal associations, other state agencies, and DILHR staff before it was introduced into the legislature.

Watch your association newsletters for information. A summary of changes is available from the T.I.C. Use the form on pg. 7 or call 800/442-4615. Additional information is available from Pat Schultz, DILHR Construction Wage Standards Section, P.O. Box 8928, Madison, 53708, phone 608/266-6469, fax 608/267-4592.

## Calendar

### T.I.C. workshops

Specific details and locations for workshops are in the announcements mailed to all **Crossroads** recipients.

**Liveable Neighborhoods: Rethinking Residential Streets** Are you getting requests from neighborhoods to do something about the speed, volume, or character of traffic on their streets? Do they say it's too noisy, too fast, too much? Are you able to respond to their requests in a satisfactory way? This national satellite workshop will bring you up to speed on the latest ideas on traffic calming and crime prevention through environmental design. Hear from experts and learn from three case studies with very different approaches to this issue.

June 19, 11:00 am to 2:30 pm at four locations in Wisconsin

**Winter Road Maintenance** Your opportunity to rethink your operations, learn from others and tune up your approach to snow and ice control and other winter maintenance activities.

Sept 11	Brookfield	Sept 17	Tomah
Sept 12	Green Bay	Sept 18	Eau Claire
Sept 13	Barneveld	Sept 19	Cable
Sept 20	Rhineland		

### UW-Madison seminars

Local government officials are eligible for a limited number of scholarships for the following engineering courses in Madison. Use the form on page 7 for details or call 800/442-4615.

**Cost Effective Drainage System Design**, Aug. 13-16

**Effective Detention Basin Design Techniques**, Sept. 9-12

**Traffic Engineering Fundamentals**, Sept. 30-Oct. 2

**Managing Snow and Ice Control Operations**, Oct. 7-8

**Traffic Signal Design Software**, October 21-23

**Advanced Traffic Signal Design Using TEAPAC**, Oct. 24-25

# Replacing culverts, cleaning ditches?

Plan ahead.

Replacing a culvert can have a big effect on the stream it carries. Set the culvert a couple inches too high and fish can't get to upstream spawning grounds. Speed up water flow and you may cause scouring of the stream bottom and flooding downstream.

Most bridge and culvert projects must meet the standards of *Trans 207* of Wisconsin Administrative Code. In addition, there are erosion control and stormwater runoff regulations that apply to most road rehabilitation or maintenance projects. If a wetland is affected, there may be other local, state and federal protection laws.

Sorting through the guidelines and figuring out which apply when can be pretty confusing. Fortunately, help is available.

"The best rule of thumb is to contact the local DNR liaison for every project. It can take just one phone call to ensure you're protecting the environment," says Al Stranz of DNR's Green Bay office. He's one of eleven DNR staff responsible for coordinating environmental protection with highway and road projects and for seeing that *Trans 207* and other environmental guidelines are followed.

"Every 36 inch culvert in some of my areas has the potential to be a Class I trout stream," Stranz points out. "Set the culvert six inches too high and you block fish from spawning migration. That means you've effectively eliminated it as a trout stream."

Stranz and the other DNR Transportation Liaisons can quickly advise on whether any permits or plans are needed and the depth it should be placed at. They can also recommend ways the contractor can protect the stream during construction.

Mike Exferd, Oconto County Highway Commissioner finds that getting an early start means few delays. "I normally get a letter off to Al [Stranz] in the early part of the year listing the major culvert replacement projects I'm planning. He checks them out and gets back to me by letter with his conditions and concerns." When last minute projects come up, Exferd says, he gives Stranz a call. "Usually he gets back to me pretty quickly."

Contractors, county highway engineers, DOT district engineers, culvert suppliers, and consulting engineers who have worked with WisDOT projects also know the guidelines and can often help local officials plan for culvert projects.

"We do a lot of work with towns," says Jack Dittmar, Waupaca County highway engineer. "We can do the calculations and usually we can show that they're not going to make things any worse." Dittmar suggests that the extra time and paperwork required can be a burden on towns and on small contractors working on small jobs for them.

## Protecting stream hydraulics

"Sizing is a critical issue for culverts," says Jim Morrissey, the Milwaukee-area DNR liaison. "Too fast a flow can quickly scour out stream bottoms and destroy spawning areas; too large a culvert can spread out the flow, making water too shallow for fish to pass."

You should not just replace a culvert with another of the same size, either. If upstream areas have changed from farmland to residential developments, there will be more runoff. Flooding may result. "You have to think about land use activity in the watershed which impacts the flow and velocity of stormwater," says Morrissey.

It's easy to think of streams, especially urban ones that only flow in wet weather, as just a pathway for moving water, but they often have a high degree of environmental value, Morrissey points out. It's a value that you can't necessarily recognize just by looking at them.



*Too little, too late. Plan ahead for erosion control. Have all materials on site before you make the first soil cut. FDM Chapter 10 can tell you how (see Resources pg. 6)*

## DNR district transportation liaisons

**Southern District**  
Fitchburg, Hal Meier,  
608/275-3308,  
Russ Anderson,  
608/275-3467,  
Tracy Eagan,  
608/275-3324

*Counties:* Columbia, Dane, Dodge, Fond du Lac, Grant, Green, Green Lake, Iowa, Jefferson, Lafayette, Marquette, Richland, Rock, Sauk

**Lake Michigan District**  
Green Bay,  
Al Stranz,  
414/492-5818,  
Kelley O'Connor,  
414/492-5819

*Counties:* Florence, Marinette, Menominee, Oconto, Shawano, Waupaca, Waushara (Stranz); Brown, Calumet, Door, Kewaunee, Manitowoc, Outagamie, Winnebago (O'Connor)

**Western District**  
Eau Claire, Rob Strand,  
715/839-1609,  
Craig Thompson  
608/785-9014

*Counties:* Chippewa, Clark, Dunn, Eau Claire, Pepin, Pierce, St. Croix (Strand); Buffalo, Crawford, Jackson, Monroe, La Crosse, Trempealeau, Vernon, (Thompson)

**North Central District**  
Rhineland, Jim Grafelman,  
715/365-8927

*Counties:* Adams, Forest, Juneau, Langlade, Lincoln, Marathon, Oneida, Portage, Vilas, Wood

**Northwest District**  
Spooner, Diane Conklin, 715/635-4229, Bill Gantz, 715/635-4227, Dan Michels (DOT projects only), 715/635-4228

*Counties:* Ashland, Barron, Bayfield, Burnett, Douglas, Polk, Rusk, Sawyer, Washburn, Iron, Price, Taylor



*This culvert was set too high. Brook trout cannot pass through it to spawning areas on this Class I trout stream.*



*This small ditching project dumped tons of sediment into the river because no erosion control was used. Simple tools like matting, silt fences, hay bales, and rock riprap would have helped protect the river's water quality.*



*Even small wetlands are valuable and protected. Dumping soil destroys them, and leaving the soil bare makes the situation worse. Local, state and national protection ordinances can require expensive repairs.*

**Southeast District**  
Milwaukee, Jim Morrissey, 414/263-8525, Vic Pappas, 414/263-8648  
*Counties:* Kenosha, Racine, Walworth, Milwaukee, Waukesha (Morrissey), Ozaukee, Washington, Sheboygan (Pappas)

**Note:** DNR is reorganizing and some county contacts may change this fall. If you have trouble reaching the right person, please call Mike Neumann at DNR, 608/266-5428, fax: 608/267-5231.

Hal Meier from the Madison-area DNR office agrees: "A lot of people think that channelizing the stream is the best way to get water away from roads, but that just causes problems downstream. We want to keep stormwater on the land so it adds to our water table instead of going down the Mississippi River." In general, the goal is to install a culvert that maintains the stream's water velocity and direction with minimum interference.

### Ditches also need care

When maintaining roadside ditches, it's important to recognize the power of moving water and the polluting effects of the sediment it carries. Plan ahead and start early for projects to grade shoulders, remove sediment from ditch bottoms, or reshape slopes and ditches. Local officials have new responsibilities for stormwater management under NR-216 of the Wisconsin Administrative Code. WisDOT has developed standards for erosion control and stormwater management in *Trans 201* (Wisc. Admin. Code). These may also help local officials. Here are some general guidelines to consider:

- Make an erosion control plan ahead of time and have erosion control materials on site before you open any soil
- Review plans with a DNR liaison and/or county highway staff person
- Consider the pitch of the ditch. Slow down water movement to let sediment drop out before the water enters a stream or pond
- Open as little soil as possible at any one time
- Use proper and effective erosion control
- Close raw soil immediately with mulch and plantings
- Remove dredged material and dispose of it in an appropriate upland site
- Protect wetlands. Don't park, pile, or dump there
- Remember to include plans for land next to ditches that may be disturbed by equipment or vehicles, or where you will pile soil or gravel

*Chapter 10, Erosion Control, of the WisDOT Facilities Development Manual (FDM), has detailed descriptions of products and techniques that can be very helpful. Copies are \$5. See Resources for details.*

Ditches can also be environmentally important. For example, northern pike around Green Bay migrate into spring-flooded roadside ditches to spawn in the grasses and gravel areas. Within two weeks, the eggs hatch, the tiny fish swim back downstream, and the water dries up. In addition, roadside ditches and intermittent streams everywhere in the state may be important spring spawning sites for minnows and other food fish.

"You should always check with the DNR on ditches, especially in our area," says Oconto County Highway Commissioner Mike Exferd. "Most any drainage ditch is classified as a stream and gets water out to Green Bay. We also have several ditches that are classified as wetlands."

Be sure to coordinate with the DNR liaison on ditch maintenance. He or she will tell you if any permits are required, whether there are any critical endangered resources in the area, what timing issues are involved, or if there are other problems.

Planning ahead and contacting a DNR liaison well before you start a culvert, bridge, ditching, or road rehabilitation process can protect you from the extra costs of fixing damages or re-doing projects later. Don't wait till your equipment or contractor is on site.

And when plans are set, be sure your work crews or contractors actually follow them.

*Guidelines for effective erosion control are described in Trans 207, and in Chapter 10, Erosion Control of the WisDOT Facilities Development Manual. See the Resources section on page 6 for information on how to get copies. Gayle Stearn at WisDOT can answer questions on erosion control. Call her at 608/267-3766.*

*You can get the name and phone number of your county's DNR Transportation Liaison from the list at the left.*

## Drivers license and CDL news

**Grader operators removing snow** Federal interpretation of the Commercial Drivers License (CDL) law now mandates CDLs for grader operators doing snow removal. This means these operators must also be in a drug and alcohol testing program. Employers should move forward with getting these operators properly licensed.

**CDLs not needed for small vehicles** Drivers of small dump trucks (GVWRs below 26,001 pounds) used for snowplow operations **do not** need CDLs. This applies only so long as the registered and actual loaded weights are also below 26,001 pounds.

**Drug testing programs** As of January 1, 1996, employers of CDL drivers (regardless of size) are required to have testing programs in place to check drivers for alcohol and drugs. If you don't yet have a program in place, you need to establish one.

**Backup snowplow drivers law** As yet, Wisconsin has not implemented the federal CDL exception for backup snowplow drivers employed by a governmental unit with population of less than 3000 people. It may be in place for the 1996-97 winter.

*If you have questions about CDLs, call Julie Clark, at WisDOT, 266-2239. Some of this information is summarized from a March 25, 1996 memorandum written by John J. Sobotik, Assistant General Counsel, Wisc. Dept. of Transportation. For a copy of this memorandum call his office at 608/266-8810, or use our Reader Response form on page 7.*

## Resources

*A limited number of copies of the printed materials listed here are available from the Wisconsin T.I.C. unless otherwise noted. To get your copy call 800/442-4615 or use the form on page 7. Videotapes are loaned free by Wisconsin County Extension Offices.*

**Access, Location, and Design, Participant Notebook**, NHI Course No. 15255, 1993, 492 pp. Protect street capacity and reduce traffic conflicts by applying the principals, standards, and methods presented in this well-organized resource and design guide. Helpful to engineers, planners and consultants who design streets and commercial driveways, review development plans, and develop or administer street access policies and practices.

**ROADWARE 6.0**, the latest version of the T.I.C. pavement management software that implements the *PASER* pavement rating system. With this new version you can keep track of the condition and maintenance costs of your pavements, shoulders, drainage, curbs, and sidewalks. You can also project five years ahead and analyze how alternate street maintenance treatments, projects, and various budgets will change the overall condition of your street system and whether you've reduced the maintenance backlog or not. Version 6.0 is more flexible and user friendly. If you have used earlier versions your data is easily transferred. If you do not use a pavement management system you can learn more about the benefits of *PASER* and *Roadware 6.0* by calling the T.I.C. at 800/442-4615 or by using the form on page 7.

**Views from the Road: A community guide for assessing rural historic landscapes**, by David Coppins, Island Press, Washington, D.C., 1995, \$25. This easy-to-use guide can help the non-expert understand the characteristics of scenic beauty and identify it along roadsides.

**Chapter 10, Erosion Control, WisDOT Facilities Development Manual (FDM)**, about 150 pp. A detailed description of materials and installation of erosion control devices. Copies are \$5 from Mark Truby at WisDOT, 608/266-9349, P.O. Box 7965, Madison, WI 53707-7965. Future updates and revisions are not automatic.

**Trans 207 Design and Construction of Municipal Highway Bridges in or over Navigable Streams**, 13 pp. This chapter of the Wisconsin Administrative Code has specific guidelines for environmental protections during culvert or bridge replacements and includes erosion control measures.

**Bidding Small Road Improvement Projects**, audio tape of ETN broadcast, 2/13/96. Discusses legal background for bidding small projects and using sample documents. Copies are \$6.80, payable to UW-Extension. Request by name and date from: ETN Tape Orders, ICS-UWEX, 975 Observatory Dr., Madison, WI 53706.

**Bidding documents for small road projects** Sample documents prepared by the T.I.C. appropriate for simple paving or sealcoat projects. Also includes owner checklist. These documents have been updated from those provided at the February ETN workshop.

## New tapes in video library

**Maintaining and Controlling Roadside Vegetation**, (#17917) 120 min. T.I.C. This videotape of the February 1996 satellite workshop interviews citizens and a local highway official about a roadside tree-cutting dispute. Also features presentations and Q&A by Dick Stark, WisDOT landscape architect, Wayne Tlusty, UW-Extension landscape architect, Steve Pudloski of the T.I.C., and Rick Stadelman, executive director, Wisconsin Towns Association.

**A Traffic Plan to Live By (13-tape series)** A new resource for your in-house work zone traffic control training programs. Designed especially for low-speed, urban street locations, and training maintenance crews and inspectors. Each module is a 45-minute session focusing on a particular traffic control application or problem. Included is an easy-to-follow training leader's guide, a master copy of a participant handout, and a video of real-life examples of proper traffic control procedures. Produced by Traffic Education and Consulting Services and Wausau Insurance.

Three traffic control concepts are stressed throughout: *visibility*, *advanced warning and control*, and the *P.L.A.N.* method of setting up work zone traffic control: *Preview the location*, *Lay out the traffic flow on a diagram*, *Analyze the diagram and design the control*, *Navigate through the work zone as if you were a motorist and then make necessary revisions*. Basic concepts and the *P.L.A.N.* method are introduced in the first tape. The series then applies the concepts and method to twelve problem areas:

**Introduction to Low Speed Traffic Control** (#17904)  
**Devices** (#17905)

**Traffic Control Procedures** (#17906)

**Unattended Work Sites** (#17907)

**Parking Lane/Shoulder Work** (#17908)

**Low Speed Lane Closures** (#17909)

**Intersection Work** (#17910)

**Pedestrians** (#17911)

**Protection of Locators and Surveyors** (#17912)

**Flagging** (#17913)

**Street Closures** (#17914)

**City Maintenance Operations** (#17915)

**Moving and Mobile Operations** (#17916)

**Roadside Maintenance** from page 1

trees near the pavement edge, and for places where drivers tend to speed” says the T.I.C.’s Steve Pudloski who also participated in the satellite course panel.

Consider using other techniques to enhance safety where the recommended clear zone width is not possible, Pudloski suggests. For example:

- Remove trees and objects with a crash history
- Widen travel lanes and shoulders
- Reduce excessive road crown
- Paint center and edge lines
- Install signs
  - delineators along shoulder edges
  - chevrons at curves
  - object markers on trees or other obstacles
  - advanced warning signs
  - speed advisories
- Reduce speed limits
- Install guardrail
- Plant protective shrubs between road and object



*A lawn-like roadside is safe and simple to maintain, but visually boring.*



*Roadsides with tall grass and wildflowers are just as safe, but also more attractive.*

**Protect visual quality**

Good quality road surfaces contribute to a community’s economy, as does the scenic beauty of its roadsides. Surveys show that natural beauty is the visitor’s top reason for choosing a place for recreation and four out of five people mention sightseeing and driving for pleasure as forms of

recreation. Wisconsin’s excellent local roads also attract people who bike and walk.

“People generally agree on what they value as scenic in a setting,” says Wayne Tlusty, UW Extension landscape architect. These include:

- Tree canopies
- Diversity of vegetation
- Naturalness
- Fall color
- Shrubs and large trees
- Vistas and views

Roadsides can be managed for more scenic beauty, says Tlusty. The key is individualizing and planning ahead.

**Policy-making the hard way**

It took a year of hard feelings, a lot of bad press, and meetings attended by several hundred people before Portage County had a workable brush/tree removal policy.

The policy was developed after a public controversy over cutting large trees in a roadside. Neighboring farmers had requested that their deteriorated, flooding-prone road be improved to accommodate their large trucks. Other county residents who used the road for recreation became very disturbed

*Continued on page 8*

**Reader Response**



If you have a comment on a **Crossroads** story, a question about roadways or equipment, an item for the *Idea Exchange*, a request for workshop information or resources, or a name for our mailing list, fill in this form and mail *in an envelope* to:

**Crossroads**

Transportation Information Center  
University of Wisconsin–Madison FAX 608/263-3160  
432 North Lake Street  
Madison, WI 53706

- Please put me on your **Crossroads** mailing list.
- My idea, comment or question is \_\_\_\_\_

Please send me information on \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Title/Agency \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_

Zip \_\_\_\_\_ Phone (      ) \_\_\_\_\_

(We'll call you to get more details or answer your question.)

**Roadside Maintenance**

from page 7

when the trees were cut.

The main feature of the policy is "lots of advance notice," says Dale Peterson, Portage County State Patrol Superintendent. Every property owner now gets a letter when a rehabilitation project is in the idea stage. The town chairman is notified. There are ads in the newspapers and a public hearing. If there are objections to the project that can't be resolved, the county highway committee makes the final decision on the project.

*Trimming back trees can improve safety. Clusters of trees and varied vegetation types are more appealing than straight rows (left). You may want to cut back heavy forests, but clear cutting is ugly. Brush left along the roadside is also unsafe (right).*



"I'd much rather go through public hearings than I would a controversy," says Peterson. "Our goal is to make the taxpayer feel at ease with the project." Public hearings can be helpful, Peterson says. Through them highway department staff have learned about unique timing issues from special businesses along the road, about small trees that may be very old or historically significant, and about special drainage problems that they were not aware of.

When brush removal is planned the supervisor talks to each property owner ahead of time, marks trees and brush for removal and carefully identifies right-of-way lines.

"We'll make every effort to save significant trees, and if we can't we may offer to plant wildflowers on the right-of-way or even to plant new trees off the right-of-way if the landowner will maintain them," says Peterson. The Portage County policy also specifies no herbicide use and no clearcutting. Each roadside segment is considered individually. "It is time-consuming for the supervisors," says Peterson. So is the alternative.

Videotapes of **Maintaining and Controlling Roadside Vegetation** (120 min. #17917) are available on loan. Call or fax the T.I.C. for copies of the program handouts (or use the form on page 7). *Trusty* recommends a book: **Views from the Road** (see Resources). For more information on Portage County's brush & tree removal policy, contact Dale Peterson, State Patrol Superintendent, 715/345-5230.

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