

Mowing Smart

A Cost-Saving and Eco-Friendly Policy

This policy is intended for use by state, county, and township road maintenance authorities and is endorsed by Mn/DOT and the DNR. The primary emphasis of this policy is to reduce mowing of roadsides to a minimum. This will reduce cost and help the environment. The primary purpose of vegetative cover on roadsides is to prevent erosion of the soil. With high gas prices and herbicides costs, road authorities need to use their resources more efficiently than ever.

Rural Mowing Guidelines:

Safety Takes Precedent

1. Mow the first 8 feet of the shoulder before the grass is 12” high.
2. Mow intersection zones for good visibility.
3. Highway directional and warning signs, traffic signals, and other road markers must be kept clearly visible to highway users at all times. Approaches to signs should be mowed for approximately 500 feet if necessary.
4. Insides of curves should be mowed as necessary to maintain sight distance.

Importance of Weed Control

5. Spot mow/spray noxious weeds to reduce propagation. Mowing noxious weeds 3 times per summer will significantly set them back and prevent seed production. Tackle small patches aggressively before they become a major problem.
6. To minimize the spread of weeds: Mow weed patches before they go to seed; clean off mower after mowing infested areas
7. The Commissioner of Agriculture has deemed 11 noxious weeds as prohibited. There are also county-listed weeds known as secondary weeds. Be familiar with these weeds so that native prairie plants are not inadvertently mowed. Harmful plants that road authorities should be aware of are Wild Parsnip and Poison Sumac. These can cause severe rashes.
8. Spot mow as required for brush and tree control. Brush can be left on the back slope for snow control and wildlife habitat.

Ways to Economize

9. 100% mowing is discouraged. Most bottoms and back slopes do not need to be mowed annually except for safety and weed control as outlined above.
10. Let the grass get a bit long. The recommended height is 4–12 inches. Grass that is at least 4 inches long is more resistant to drought and weed infestation.
11. Vegetation growing on gravel shoulders can be controlled by blading. Plan grading routes efficiently so shoulder maintenance can be accomplished en route.
12. Maintain prairie roadsides by occasionally spot burning (about 25-30% of the site at a time). New construction sites are ideal for planting native prairie, which will reduce the need for future mowing and weed control. Contact the DNR Roadsides for Wildlife for cost sharing. www.mndnr.gov/roadsidesforwildlife.

From Mn/DOT MAINTENANCE MANUAL 3/2/07