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Guidelines for Managing the Harvesting of Native Flowers, Seed and Timber from Roadsides



Introduction

The diversity of values associated with roadside vegetation is well documented and acknowledged. In landscapes that have been extensively cleared, roadside vegetation provides essential wildlife corridors and habitat for local flora and fauna, including a number of threatened species. Hence it is highly desirable that this asset is managed in such a way as to ensure its conservation and sustainability. The control and management of roadside vegetation is the responsibility of the road manager. Local government authorities, as road managers, are often approached for 'permission' to take various flora products from the roadside. These requests are mainly for wildflowers, native seed and firewood. Other products which may be sought include material for making didgeridoos, other types of craft wood, and stakes or poles for various purposes.

The implementation of these simple guidelines by road managers for the removal of flora and timber material from the roadsides will ensure that the vegetated roadside reserve is maintained for its biodiversity values, and the benefit of the community and road users.

In some instances the Roadside Conservation Committee (RCC) is supportive of the sustainable harvesting of flora, such as salvage (removal of dead material that is not significant wildlife habitat or is material to be destroyed by road works), or the selective collection of seed for revegetation. However, each case should be viewed on its merits and any decision to facilitate harvesting from roadsides should be referred to the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) (previously CALM) and/or the RCC for advice. Licences allowing the taking of roadside flora may be issued by DEC when supported by the road managing authority.





Guidelines for Managing the Harvesting of Native

Legislation

All Western Australian native flora is protected under the *Wildlife Conservation Act 1950*. Native flora includes all parts of a native plant, including its flowers, seed, and timber. Protection of native flora under the Act means that a person can only take (cut or remove) native flora from Crown land under a licence.

Road and rail reserves are Crown land, and hence a licence is required to cut or remove any native flora from a roadside or rail line. There is, however, a legal provision by which the road manager or their agent (contractor) does not require a licence whilst undertaking legitimate road management activities, such as those approved under the *Environmental Protection (Clearing of Native vegetation) Regulations 2004*. This provision does not extend to other persons who wish to take protected flora from roadsides.

There are two types of licences that apply to the taking of protected flora from Crown land: Commercial Purposes Licences, where the flora is being taken for any commercial purpose; and Scientific or Other Prescribed Purposes Licences, where the protected flora is being taken for specific non-commercial purposes.

In issuing a licence, DEC is required to be assured that the activity will not compromise the conservation of the flora. In determining this, DEC will seek advice from the road manager to determine the potential impact of the activity, and how the activity relates to the management objectives being applied to that land.

A licence application may be refused if the activity is either a conservation concern, or does not fit in with the management objectives of the road manager. Once issued with a licence, a licensee must comply with the conditions of the licence that are designed to ensure the activity does not adversely impact on the conservation of the flora or the natural environment in which it occurs.

Commercial Wildflower Harvesting

Western Australia is referred to as the '*Wildflower State*', and its wildflowers attract a significant number of tourists each year. Roadside vegetation provides the most accessible, and hence the most commonly viewed, array of wildflowers, and as such are an important feature of regional tourism, potentially providing a significant financial boost to local economies. Wildflower harvesting in many instances detracts from the biodiversity and tourism values of the roadside and should therefore be discouraged.

The RCC considers that the flora on roadsides is reserved and maintained for public benefit. It is therefore seen as a contradiction of purpose to allow wildflowers on roadsides to be harvested, particularly for private gain, and this activity should not be permitted.

However, there are situations where some harvesting may be considered, such as in very wide road reserves where the activity can be screened from road users and has a smaller impact on biodiversity. It is often the case that flora is harvested from roadsides because of the convenience of access, and harvesters should be directed to find alternative locations. Road managers have been discouraged from supporting or allowing such harvesting to occur, but if harvesting is to be approved, then the points provided at the end of these guidelines should be considered.

Flowers, Seed and Timber from Roadsides

Seed Collection

Throughout much of the south west, revegetation of the native flora is being undertaken to redress the problems that historic clearing has created. Increasingly, this revegetation is aimed at using local native flora so as to recreate the native vegetation to support biodiversity objectives. The paradox is that in many areas the native vegetation has been cleared to such an extent that adequate sources of native seed cannot be found for undertaking this work. Roadside vegetation may be one of few sources of such seed.

Seed production is an important component of remnant vegetation. Some species, called re-seeder species, regrow only from seed when plants are either killed by an event, such as fire, storm damage, or die as part of their natural cycle. The maintenance of adequate seed of these species is necessary as a precaution to ensure the continuity of the flora biodiversity.

Native seed is also an important food source for native fauna living in roadside vegetation, from ants to birds and mammals. The maintenance of this fauna is important for the continuing survival of the vegetation, especially where the fauna is required to pollinate the flora.

When seed is needed for *bona fide* revegetation projects within the local community, and no other source of local seed is available, then the managing authority may consider giving permission for collection of seed from roadsides. Such collection must be under the appropriate licence issued by DEC and the harvesting should be done in a way that does not endanger the long-term survival of the roadside vegetation.

Where seed collection is to be authorised on roadsides, the road manager should consider the points listed at the end of these guidelines. Specific consideration should be given to the methods that are approved for harvesting the seed, the quantity of seed that may be taken, and the species from which the seed is to be sourced.

Timber Harvesting from Roadsides.

Timber is harvested for a range of reasons, including saw logs, firewood and craft wood. Due to the ease of access, timber harvesters may wish to source timber from roadside vegetation for these purposes.

Roadside managers are encouraged to retain timber on roadsides as an important component of the natural habitat, which fulfils ecological, aesthetic and land management functions. Fallen logs and branches within the roadside create important habitat for many species of insects, reptiles, mammals and birds, thus enhancing the roadside biodiversity. Insects and reptiles that live in fallen timber are also important elements of the food chain, and are very important to the functioning of natural systems, and the survival of many other native animals.

The RCC recommends that harvesting of timber from roadsides should not be permitted except in defined road safety, fence line or service clearance zones, or where a tree has fallen, or appears likely to fall into clearance zones.

Where timber removal is to be allowed, consideration should be given to the points raised at the end of these guidelines, especially in relation to safety issues related to timber cutting. Permission to remove timber should be specific to certain sections of roadsides where the removal is necessary for other planned road management purposes.





Guidelines For Harvesting On Roadsides

- In all cases the permission of the managing authority, i.e. Main Roads WA, Local Government or DEC, must be sought before native flora is removed from a roadside.
- Flora removal should be from only designated roads, which have wider vegetated road verges i.e. vegetation width > 3metres.
- The number of operators authorised to remove flora from a roadside should be strictly limited to that which can be sustained and managed. The determination of this is at the judgement of the managing authority, but consideration should be taken of the type of flora being harvested and an evaluation of monitoring of the impact of the harvest activity. Advice may be sought from DEC or the RCC.
- Approval for flora harvesting should be for a set period, with a review of the impact and operation before renewal.
- Approval should also stipulate approved methods of harvesting, the species which may be harvested, and the quantity of material to be taken. Advice on harvest conditions may be obtained from DEC.
- Any flora removed should not affect the viability of the residual seed bank. It is recommended that no more than 20% of the flowers or seed on a plant should be taken, unless it is in an area that is scheduled to be cleared as part of road management.
- Methods of harvesting flora should not jeopardise the survival of the plant/tree, unless it is in an area that is scheduled to be cleared as part of road management.
- The removal of whole plants should be restricted to areas that are scheduled to be cleared as part of road management. Note, some species of flora such as zamia palms and grass trees cannot be removed for commercial purposes without a special endorsement on the Commercial Purposes Licence issued by DEC.
- No flora of special conservation concern (Declared Rare Flora or Priority Flora) should be removed without special authorisation through DEC.
- No commercial harvesting of any plant product should be allowed for any reason between the markers that delineate a Environmentally Sensitive Areas defined in the *Environmental Protection (Clearing of Native Vegetation) Regulations 2004*.
- Flora harvesting should be prohibited from designated Flora Roads.
- Care should be taken that access to Dieback infected areas is limited to the drier months of the year, and vehicular access disallowed.
- Safety should always be of prime concern and every effort should be made to ensure that personal safety is a key consideration in any harvesting operation.
- Flora harvesters should not operate from the roadside in areas where the vegetation is close to the road, where vehicles cannot be safely parked off the road, or where there is poor driver visibility.

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