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A roadside note for landholders

Across the State, and even within a shire, roadside vegetation varies enormously in terms of its quality, health and conservation value. The vegetation on many roadsides has been degraded by activities such as clearing, frequent burning and weed invasion, and in some cases this has resulted in a denuded roadside landscape. Other roadsides have escaped these activities and remain as beautiful, intact corridors of remnant vegetation. Native vegetation along roadsides is environmentally significant and in some areas provides a unique opportunity to view the original vegetation of an area.

The Roadside Conservation Committee (RCC) was formed in 1985 to coordinate and promote the conservation and effective management of roadside (and rail) vegetation for the benefit of the environment and people of Western Australia.

One of the RCC's policies is to provide information to the general community on the importance of roadside vegetation for nature conservation, for farmland protection and as an amenity. The management practices of those living and working adjacent to roadsides can have a great influence on the condition of roadside vegetation in an area.



Roadsides hold many values, but they can become degraded if not managed appropriately. Photo – K Payne



A beautiful, healthy roadside in the Shire of Wongan-Ballidu. Good quality roadside vegetation is attractive and forms the basis of WA's important wildflower tourism industry. Photo – K Jackson



A highly degraded roadside in the Shire of Carnamah. Roadsides such as these have been impacted by a number of activities, including clearing, frequent fire and weed invasion. Degraded roadsides require ongoing management, particularly with regards to weed control, feral animals and fire, and provide little value to the landscape. Photo – K Jackson

The importance of roadside vegetation

Road maintenance values

1. Roadside vegetation plays a role in protecting and maintaining both public and private infrastructure. For example, roadside vegetation can help prevent road wash-outs in high rainfall events.
2. The presence of roadside vegetation locally can reduce the need for road maintenance works because it mitigates salinity impacts.
3. Roadside vegetation can prevent soil deposits on roads resulting from strong winds.
4. Reduction in the expense and time commitment required by the managing authority to maintain roads and control weeds.

Conservation values

5. The roadside may be the only remaining example of original vegetation within a cleared area. It therefore:
 - a. assists in vegetation mapping and distribution studies
 - b. provides a benchmark for study of soil change through agricultural development
 - c. provides a source of valuable local seed for revegetation projects
 - d. acts as habitat for local plants and animals.
6. Rare or threatened plants may occur on the roadside. Because of past selective land clearing, roadside remnants may harbour the last few populations of certain plants.
7. Roadsides may provide nest sites and refuges for native animals, particularly birds, insects and reptiles.
8. Roadsides may act as a biological corridor. In agricultural areas, small bush remnants are islands in a sea of crops. Small animals, such as birds, reptiles and bats may be confined to them as they find it difficult to cross large open areas such as paddocks. Roadside can act as corridors, connecting these islands and helping animals to move along them to find food and breeding opportunities.

Economic values

9. Roadsides may provide a windbreak and stock shelter for adjoining farmland. Existing roadside vegetation can be a starting point in farm shelter planning.
10. Native vegetation is more difficult to ignite than exotic grass and weeds, and therefore is less of a bushfire hazard. Vegetated roads can assist in wildfire control.
11. A good cover of native vegetation helps keep roadside maintenance costs low in terms of both soil erosion and weed invasion.

12. The deep-rooted perennial vegetation on roadsides helps control water table rises as well as reducing the threat of salinity.
13. Roadside vegetation is attractive and forms the basis for Western Australia's important wildflower tourism industry, part of a \$4.2 billion industry.

Social values

14. Local native plants impart individual character to roadsides and alleviate what would otherwise be 'sameness' of agricultural areas.
15. Roadside vegetation provides a 'sense of place' to those travelling through the area, for example, the Wandoo woodlands of the western Wheatbelt and mallee shrublands of the eastern Wheatbelt.
16. Many people have strong emotional connection to certain trees and plants, therefore the preservation of these is important.
17. The Wheatbelt is referred to as 'the bush', and to many, the bush is what is seen in the roadside. This is often one of the only remaining examples of natural bush within an area.



Roadside vegetation provides valuable habitat for native plants and animals. This numbat is using the fallen timber in this roadside for shelter from weather and predators, and eats termites that feed on the dead wood and leaf litter on the ground. Photo – A Thomas



Wildflowers, such as these stunning Sturt's desert peas near Marble Bar, are a g

Roadsides and their neighbours

Some issues that landholders may come across in relation to roadsides include:

- installation of a new fence, or maintenance of an existing one
- revegetation adjacent to roadsides
- burning and fire protection
- rubbish dumping
- weed control
- feral animal control.

The practices of road managers and adjoining landholders can influence the health and preservation of roadsides. Some of the landowner activities that may have a detrimental effect on roadside vegetation include:

Clearing roadside vegetation

Clearing removes native vegetation and wildlife habitat, which in the case of tree hollows can take hundreds of years to re-grow. It also causes soil disturbance which creates the perfect environment for weed invasion. It is far easier to protect the existing vegetation than it is to try and revegetate after clearing.

Grazing roadside vegetation

Grazing is a form of disturbance; some native plant species cannot tolerate grazing, and may be lost from the area. Grazing can also have an impact on the soil characteristics and introduce and spread weeds.

Chemical drift (for example herbicides and fertiliser)

Native plants have evolved to low nutrient soils and the addition of nutrients to these areas, through fertiliser spread from adjacent lands, can have an adverse impact on native plants while encouraging the growth of weeds. Herbicides, either applied directly for weed control or as spray drift, can cause the death of native plants.

Establishing or maintaining firebreaks in roadsides

Road reserves are not meant to be used for firebreaks, and any unnecessary loss of native vegetation should be avoided. Landowners are encouraged to maintain firebreaks inside their property boundary.

Cropping right up to roadside boundary

Where paddocks are not fenced, landowners occasionally crop right up to, or even within, the road reserve. Even if native vegetation is not cleared, damage may still be caused through soil compaction, chemical drift into the roadside vegetation and competition from exotic plants. In most shires, there is also a requirement to have a firebreak around the perimeter of a property.



In this case, the landowner has set their property fence back, and the firebreak is not encroaching into the road reserve. Photo – D Mickle



This roadside in Wagin was cleared down to bare soil when replacing a fence. This removed important native shrubs and ground cover, and created an ideal environment for weed establishment that will require ongoing management. When replacing a fence, landowners should minimise unnecessary vegetation disturbance, and are encouraged to set back the new fence inside their boundary.



great attraction to tourists. Photo – Tourism WA

What can landholders do?

Be aware

Roadside vegetation can sometimes be destroyed because of a lack of awareness about the values it holds. Treat roadside vegetation as you would any other valuable area of natural bush, and consider how activities near the roadside could affect the health and preservation of the roadside vegetation. Share this information with others around you and contact us for more information.

Take part in roadside surveys

The RCC works in partnership with local volunteers, Landcare, community groups and local government in coordinating a roadside survey and mapping program. The survey is vehicle-based and looks at a number of general attributes. Botanical expertise is not essential. The aim is to survey and map all roadsides throughout all shires in the south-west land division. As at December 2013, the conservation value of vegetation along approximately 45,000km of road in 62 shires has been mapped.

Assessment of the conservation value of particular roadsides is a vital step in developing strategies for their management. Local volunteers carry out the majority of surveys and extra assistance is always appreciated. If you would like to learn more about this program, or to take part in roadside surveys in your area, please contact the RCC by email at rcc@dpaw.wa.gov.au.

Tell us about a special roadside

Locals in many areas often know of some really good roadsides that the RCC is not aware of, so please let us know about them! You could nominate a road, or section of road, as a Flora Road by writing to the RCC. A Flora Road is one that contains vegetation of special conservation, cultural or scenic value and also provides an attractive tourist drive route within a shire or region. Anybody can identify potential Flora Roads; including local interest groups or individuals, or the road manager. The agreement of the road manager is required for a nomination to be successful.

We also encourage local government to establish a 'Register of Roads Important for Conservation' within their shire. This should outline any special treatment that the site should receive and be consulted prior to any work being initiated in the area.

Talk to the road manager

If you would like to protect and preserve roadside vegetation near you, you may like to talk with the road manager prior to works commencing. The RCC is an advocate for best-practice road maintenance techniques, and can provide advice, training and information to those working in the road environment, such as Main Roads WA contractors and local government works staff. As an adjacent landowner, some roadside maintenance and construction activities may impact on you and your land, not to mention the roadside vegetation.



*In some areas, local landowners have requested that high value roadsides be declared as Flora Roads. There are currently more than 40 Flora Roads in the State.
Photo – D Lamont*



*Roadside wildflowers in the Shire of Williams.
Photo – K Payne*

For more information and advice

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Information current at July 2014. This information is available in alternative formats on request.

**Roadside
Conservation
Committee**

