



# Conserving roadside vegetation

Many people may overlook roadside vegetation as having little conservation value but these plant communities play a vital role in conserving native flora and wildlife.

The Roadside Conservation Committee and its predecessors began working to conserve roadside vegetation in Western Australia 40 years ago.

by Mia Podesta  
and Cressida Lehmann

plays a vital role in the conservation of unique flora and fauna. Roadside vegetation, a vital habitat for rare species, forms corridors for species movement and, in some cases, composes a significant part of the remaining native vegetation. Roadsides are also the window through which tourists and residents look at the land, meaning they set the tone for the character of the area and create a local atmosphere.

Roads, and therefore road reserves, were originally created for the use of horse and cart. These same road reserves must now safely accommodate large numbers of high-speed cars, large heavy haulage trucks and wide loads. Unfortunately, the ever-widening road width required to accommodate modern-day vehicles is slowly reducing the width of road reserves containing remaining native vegetation.



### The origins of roadside conservation

In WA, roadside conservation began formally in 1952 when a policy was implemented to create a two-tier reservation system consisting of conservation reserves and roadside reserves to connect them. Later, in 1960, Premier Sir David Brand, the 'father of roadside conservation', initiated a policy that all road reserves opening up new country should be wider than required for the establishment of the road alone.

He recommended road reserves be increased from one chain (20 metres) to three chains (60 metres) or even up to 10 chain widths (200 metres). Examples of road reserves which adhere to these recommendations include the majority of those along Brand Highway and Coorow-Greenhead Road.

Community concern about the loss of wildflowers and the ongoing degradation and destruction of roadside vegetation resulted in the formation of a committee to look after these vulnerable areas. The Road Verge Conservation Committee (RVCC) was formed in 1969. However, the RVCC was limited by a lack of funding and many worthwhile initiatives were not carried to fruition. As a result, the committee disbanded after 14 years of operation.

In 1984, a definitive commitment of funds for a full-time executive officer from the then Department of Conservation and Land Management and Main Roads Western Australia led to the rebirth of roadside conservation. RVCC's successor, the Roadside Conservation Committee (RCC), was created to 'coordinate and promote the conservation and effective management of rail and roadside vegetation for the benefit of the environment and



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**Main** Wildflowers line a roadside reserve.  
*Photo - Marie Lochman*

**Above** Flowering shrubs on Julimar Road reserve, Toodyay.  
*Photo - Cressida Lehmann/DEC*

**Left** Roadside vegetation provides a corridor for wildlife.  
*Photo - Bill Belson/Lochman*  
*Transparencies*



the people of Western Australia'. The committee remains in operation today.

### Triumphs of the RCC

In the past 25 years the RCC has made significant changes to roadside conservation thanks to strong partnerships with key stakeholders and committed volunteers. Its members have sought to change perceptions on the need to retain and manage roadside vegetation and increase community appreciation of roadsides, as well as provide practical skills to manage them.

An important initiative of the RCC has been the roadside survey project. Roadside vegetation is surveyed by local volunteers according to several biological characteristics to give a condition rating. The resulting map is an important tool in developing strategies for the management of roadsides, and raising community awareness. Since 1989, 47 shires across the south-west have been mapped for their conservation value.

The RCC has trained local shires in roadside management techniques for 29 years. The training programs aim to

raise awareness among works crews of the values of roadside vegetation and the best ways to balance the practicalities of road construction and maintenance with conservation outcomes.

The RCC has published a wide range of material including technical handbooks for roadside maintenance, guides for adjoining land managers, wildflower drive pamphlets and journal articles.

The RCC also manages the *Flora Roads* program, which recognises roadsides of high conservation value with significant tourism and landscape value. A select group of 33 roads from 16 shires are distinguished as *Flora Roads*.

### Vision for the future

Despite the achievements of the RVCC and the RCC, there is still evidence that roadside vegetation is in decline. During the next 25 years, the RCC will strive for continued advancement in roadside vegetation management to ensure the preservation of those values for which roadside vegetation is so important.



**Above** Salmon gum arches on the Coorow-Latham Road, a *Flora Road*.

Photo - Cressida Lehmann/DEC

**Below** Sceptre banksias line a road near Kalbarri.

Photo - Graham Zemunik/Sallyanne Cousans Photography

**Right** *Flora Road* project sign.

Photo - Cressida Lehmann/DEC



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