

Rest Areas and Wildflowers

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This presentation includes two topics that come under the responsibility of the Central Office landscape supervisor: rest areas and, a rather new vegetation treatment for Indiana, wildflowers.

REST AREAS

There has been quite a bit of construction in rest areas and welcome centers this past year. One rest area pair was renovated and three welcome centers were constructed. Two additional rest area pairs are currently being renovated. This phase of rest area construction will also include one welcome center and three more rest area pair renovations.

A welcome center is typically located at an entry point into the state. The welcome center is a larger facility with enhanced services. The Department of Commerce Division of Tourism Development provides staff to assist the public with travel information. This personal contact is an integral part of the state's tourism development program. Often the only stop a traveler might make in the state is a welcome center. The welcome center provides an excellent opportunity to pitch the assets of the state.

The welcome center has other services, such as picnic areas and vending areas, and some have recreational vehicle dump stations. Another feature that has become standard is duplicate rest rooms. Two men's and two women's rest rooms provide expanded capacity during peak use and no inconvenience during cleaning.

The contracting of rest area maintenance to state use contractors has doubled in 1988. State use contractors are qualifying rehabilitation centers that by law IDOH can negotiate a contract with to maintain rest areas. IDOH has realized some cost savings and observed consistent quality service at contracted rest areas.

The renovation of the rest areas and construction of the welcome centers is an important part of updating our highway services for the traveling public.

ROADSIDE WILDFLOWERS

IDOH has begun experimenting with wildflowers as an alternative treatment vegetative cover to our standard fescue turf. This work was initiated in response to the public's interest in other state's wildflower programs, the most notable being in the state of Texas. It is interesting to note that at the National Roadside Vegetation Management Association's 1988 meeting, over half of the states attending had a wildflower program. Wildflowers are viewed as a low-cost alternative roadside vegetation that can provide a sense of regional identity.

The goals of the IDOH wildflower program are the following:

- to utilize native indigenous species;
- to provide positive aesthetic impact;
- to complement adjacent property use; and

to require a maintenance cost no higher than current.

There are three approaches to using wildflowers that the Landscape Section defined. These are prairie restorations, wildflower plantings, and plantings for special problems.

Prairie restorations are a cooperative effort between IDOH and Department of Natural Resources, Division of Nature Preserves. Indiana is blessed with tall grass prairie as a native ecotype. Tall grass prairie is a tremendously diverse ecotype containing warm season grasses and a multitude of forbs (flowering herbaceous species). The grasses provide the visual continuity of the prairie. The forbs provide ever-changing display of color throughout the growing season. The restoration program consists of identifying roadside prairie remnants and restricting mowing and herbicide use. Spot brush control is used as needed for safety and to maintain the integrity of the remnant.

Because of what was learned in examining the prairie remnants, prairie mixes were selected for the wildflower plantings. The plantings are located primarily at rest areas and interchanges for maximum aesthetic impact.

Further examination of prairie remnants uncovered potential for solving special roadside vegetation problems. Mixes using water tolerant grasses can be used in ditches to out-compete cattails. Prairie grasses can provide superior erosion protection on slopes with their massive root structures. Many prairie species can also establish themselves on low fertility soils.

IDOH's experience with wildflowers on the roadside is just beginning. The continued positive response from the public and good planting results will probably lead to an expanding program.