

IRVM/Weed Commissioners Report – December 2017

Megan Dohrman, Roadside Vegetation Manager/Weed Commissioner

Native Roadside Plantings:

This year 65 Acres of roadsides were planted using native grasses and forb species. There were an increased number of cleanouts and regrades done this year. The native seed used for the roadside plantings are part of The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Grant through the IDOT. A tremendous amount of money is saved by utilizing this grant.

Prescribed Burns:

No prescribed burns were performed this year due to needing replacement parts for the current fire unit. The current fire unit is over 25 years old unit, made of fiberglass. The company for that unit no longer exists as it merged with Danko. Some of the parts are similar but, not exact. A representative from Danko came out and informed me of other possible problems using such an old unit for roadside burning. Fire units are no longer made of fiberglass as they posed hazards in some situations, and outdated parts that can't be replaced. He also added fire units are typically replaced ever 15 years as equipment is improved yearly. A new fire unit is being considered since it would be dangerous to do any roadside burns with such outdated equipment. Such an old unit can be a liability.

Spray Crews (weeds/Brush):

May through June, crews sprayed all hard surface roads for weeds. Spraying operations were shut down in late June due to code violations on the spray truck and the herbicide being used. As a Roadside Manager and weed commissioner it is my job to ensure all Iowa codes are being followed when it comes to IRVM. The equipment (vehicles, herbicides, herbicide storage) being used for IRVM is especially important, because if improperly used it can cause noxious vegetation to become herbicide resistant, become costly and cause the county to be fined. I was made aware the spray truck was never calibrated, and injection systems were taken off the truck. Without the injection system, herbicides were not being mixed properly and measuring the amount of herbicide put out per acre was not available. Prior to my employment the herbicides were off label as they were not labeled for ROW use. Herbicide was not stored properly causing chemical degradation. I have addressed these issues and they are being updated and repaired to prevent the county from being fined by IDALS. Herbicide storage has been updated, and the spray truck is at sprayer specialties being working on. It is still currently at their location.

Noxious Weed Complaints:

Since June 13th, 2017 I have received four weed complaints on the work order system, and received 8 phone calls. It has come to my attention some complaints being made were to the board of supervisors and some of those complaints were never pass along to me. This can pose a problem as; the citizens don't feel their needs are being met and if I don't know about it and a work order is not made then it technically doesn't exist. In a previous meeting with the BOS I requested that a work order be made or have that person call me directly. I don't know what was done in the past however, when a complaint comes in I personally want to talk to each person and find out more about the problem and listen to what they have to say. This will go for brush complaints as well.

Brush Complaints:

Since June 13th, 2017 I have received 23 brush complaints. Many of those complaints have been from secondary roads as their equipment was hitting limbs that were hanging over the road. If a citizen called in a complaint or a work order is made, it's important to keep an open line of communication with the public so, calling and talking to them is extremely important.

Brush Mowing:

Brush mowed this year was around 180 roadside miles only being able to reach the fore slope and in some area the ditch bottom. The current tractor IRVM uses does not have a boom mower with an arm long enough to reach some ditch bottoms and all back slopes. At times the crew would have to go back out and manually cut brush out of the backslope which is not time efficient and uses more fuel, money and resources to do the same job twice. Brush mowing can be a great tool when used at the right time.

Brush mowing alone is costly due to fuel and maintenance costs. A new management plan will be put in place for next year to help reduce these costs. The plan will consist of a foliar application during the correct time of year and mowing some area where that brush could pose a problem.

Other:

My goals for this upcoming year is to hold an open discussion of what my department will be implementing as a management plan and what services we offer. I have been working on a management plan to ensure things will get done in a more efficient manner and laws and regulations are followed to ensure the safety of the public in Hardin County. Obtaining new equipment for this year and the next fiscal year will greatly impact the amount and efficiency of the work to be done.