

Managing Roadsides 3.

Implementation

What is the Roadside Environment Committee?

We are a group of community and government organisations with an interest in roadside management. Represented on the NSW Roadside Environment Committee are:

Rural Fire Service
NSW Department of Lands
Country Energy
Local Government & Shires Association of NSW
Institute of Public Works Engineering Australia
Department of Environment and Climate Change (NSW)
Nature Conservation Council of NSW
Livestock Health and Pest Authorities
Roads and Traffic Authority
Rail Infrastructure Corporation
Catchment Management Authorities

The Roadside Environment Committee is funded by the NSW Roads and Traffic Authority.

Our aim is to encourage better management of the State's roadsides and other linear reserves for the benefit of the people and the environment of NSW. We aim to provide support, advice and resources to develop the capabilities of the State's roadside managers.

Why are roadsides important?

The roadside environment is important because it is a large area, used by almost everyone, with a variety of ecological, economic and social values. According to the NSW Roads and Traffic Authority there are more than 181 000 kilometres of public road in the State, with roadside environments making up about five per cent of the total land area of NSW. While five per cent doesn't sound very much, if you imagine putting the land surrounding our roadways, travelling stock routes and reserves together, you come up with an area equal to all of our NSW National Parks combined.

Importantly, for many parts of NSW the roadside is the only place where native vegetation remains. These native remnants often act as habitat for plant and animals species as well as helping to prevent soil erosion and land degradation problems. The roadside can have important conservation values, especially in areas which have been extensively cleared. For example, one rural landcare group estimates that while only three per cent of original native vegetation remains in their area, 60 per cent of it survives along the roadside.

Roadside environments are increasingly being seen by land managers as an important economic resource to help slow the effects of land degradation in rural areas. Travelling stock use the roadside as an important area for grazing especially in times of drought. Travelling Stock Routes (TSR's) and reserves are particularly valuable when farmers must move stock over long distances to find feed. During the recent drought more than 120,000 cattle and 170,000 sheep were sustained by TSR's and reserves managed by Livestock Health and Pest Authorities (LHPA).

The roadside provides fire fighters with strategic space for bushfire control, while council workers throughout the State also utilise the area surrounding roads as storage space for development works. It provides valuable space for public utilities such as electricity, gas and telecommunications equipment as well as opportunities for billboard advertising.

Finally, the roadside has important social and cultural uses. It contains valuable heritage landmarks such as historic markers, bridges, tree plantings and Aboriginal sites. It provides space for beekeeping and

collecting firewood and enables motorists to enjoy views of the landscape. Travellers see the roadside environment as a valuable recreational resource which also helps reduce driver fatigue.

What is this publication about?

Preparing a roadside management plan is a four step process involving:

1. Assessment
2. Planning
3. Implementation
4. Monitoring and Review

This guide outlines the steps involved in implementing a roadside environmental management plan (REMP) and is the third part of a four-part series. It is designed for local government, Livestock Health and Pest Authorities (LHPA) and community groups interested in improving environmental management. *1. Assessment*, *2. Planning* and *4. Monitoring and Review* are available from the NSW Roadside Environment Committee

Where are we up to?

At this stage you have made an assessment of the resources and other features of the roadside (step 1), mapped them and prepared an environmental plan (step 2). In any plan feedback, monitoring and review will result in continual redevelopment as environmental, social and economic forces change.

Your plan will be divided into guidelines for the three management categories, A, B and C and for special management areas. There will also be policies developed to address more widespread problems such as firewood collection or firebreaks. The plan may also include regulation of existing NSW legislation relevant to roadside resource management.

Through the process of developing the plan, there will be some awareness within the community about its objectives. You will have created expectations and concerns regarding roadsides and the community will scrutinise the implementation phase.

Many plans only gather dust on a shelf. It is the challenge for any planner to keep up the momentum, carry through with the plan, and ensure it comes to fruition.

Implementing the plan

There are strategies which assist in successfully implementing a plan. These include creating understanding and awareness of the plan and its objectives with roadside users and the wider public. Your organisation may also opt for stronger enforcement of policies and legislation. Maintaining the momentum despite staff changes, lack of financial resources, lack of political will, redirection of organisational priorities will be the challenge.

Training

Staff training is the best way of raising awareness of the plan within the organisation, generating interest and skill and encouraging staff to make informed decisions about resource management on roadsides. Staff includes everyone from grader drivers to administrators and elected representatives. The plan should also be supported by other organisations with an interest in roadside management – bush fire brigades or electricity suppliers. It is a great advantage to mix staff from these organisations in training sessions.

Training can address ecological principles, management of vegetation, grazing, soil and water, heritage areas, legislation, planning and engineering practice.

The NSW REC has developed accredited training for road crews: it is available free from the REC and the only cost to authorities is providing a training room and paying a qualified trainer or Registered Training

Organisation (like TAFE) - many councils are RTOs themselves or belong to Regional Organisations of Councils which have an RTO arm.

The Plan

There are a lot of roadside uses and issues to consider when preparing a roadside environmental plan. Putting all this together in a readable, workable plan is a challenge. People have to be able to use the plan and see what is relevant to them when working on the roadsides.

Shires, RLPBs and landcare groups which have already prepared plans found that the less written material, the better. A clear map identifying roadside management categories and special management areas should be attached to simple and brief guidelines for management.

Public education and awareness raising

An interested community will assist in implementing the plan by being more aware of their impact on the roadside and scrutinising others. Involving the community in roadside activities will also help and can save time and money. Informing the community will also allow for an assessment of the private development expectations within the community.

There are many ways of raising community awareness. Using local newspapers and radio to highlight positive outcomes is a good way. Launching the roadside environment management plan and a tree planting with local schools will provide media interest. Other methods are using rate notices and council publications, informing local community and landcare groups of the plan. They will want to coordinate their activities with the plan. Private businesses, schools, service and community groups can be involved in tree planting, weeding, litter removal or other activities on roadsides. Erecting signage is another good idea.

Significant Roadside Environment Area Signs

Roads are regularly used by everyone in the community. Placing signs on roadsides will create interest in the roadside environment. Signs also alert roadside users and works crews to areas which need special care.

The NSW Roadside Environment Committee has produced signs available to any group or organisation which identifies an area as significant. The 'Significant Roadside Environment Area' signs are 600mm x 400mm in powder coated metal and can be erected at places of local, regional, state or even national significance. This can include habitat of a rare or threatened species, to mark a stretch of significant vegetation, Aboriginal scar trees or old buildings. The signs have space available for a local emblem, contact telephone number and reference to the roadside environmental management plan.

Their key purpose is to alert works crews to areas which require special care or permission to carry out work. They are erected parallel to the road so as not to distract drivers, and prior to erection the road authority must complete a simple pro forma ensuring that the signage conforms to a local plan and has the support of the Council or LHPA.

Encouraging community activities

Community groups or local businesses can be encouraged to contribute to the maintenance of roadsides through an 'adopt a road' scheme. Already, there are examples in NSW where local communities have adopted lengths of road and undertaken to plant trees, raise awareness, and keep those areas free of litter and noxious weeds. Roadsides which are well cared for and in good condition contribute to the economy of a region by attracting tourism.

Considerations of safety and insurance arise, and a scheme should be discussed with the NSW REC before it is set up.

Dubbo Tidy Towns committee, in conjunction with Dubbo Council, is managing the 'Dubbo Highway Ownership Program'. This seeks to balance aesthetic and ecological concerns while contributing to the economic and social fabric of Dubbo and district. There is a range of organisations contributing to the success of the program including sporting groups, field naturalists, service groups and local businesses. Signs are erected marking lengths of road where groups are caring for the roadside.

Landcare groups may also be interested in taking on management of a roadside. Roadsides often offer a group the opportunity to manage an area of remnant vegetation which contributes to catchment health and provides valuable experience. The Dudauman-Frampton Landcare group, outside Cootamundra, manages Migurra Reserve, a significant piece of remnant vegetation adjacent to the Olympic Way. Management of this Crown reserve has been vested in the Landcare group.

Some groups specialise in community involvement of natural resource management activities. Organisations like Greening Australia, Landcare, Coastcare, Catchment Management Authorities, Clean Up Australia, Keep Australia Beautiful Council and Tidy Towns have expertise in getting the community involved. Schools, service groups such as Rotary, Lions and Apex, other sporting groups, local businesses and government departments can also become involved in roadside activities.

Regulation

The methods outlined so far use persuasion to encourage people to look after their roadsides. Local councils and LHPA's have rangers who regularly use the roads and scrutinise activities on the roadside. The roadside environmental plan, LEP or DCP will have policies which can be regulated. Legislation at State or Commonwealth level also provides for regulatory powers.

The effectiveness of regulation and legislative control is dependent on people knowing about it. Upon implementing any controls, they must be advertised in local press and radio. Infringements need to be reported publicly, to reinforce the intentions of your organisation.

What other resources are available to help you?

Resources come in the form of people, money or expertise.

Some of the activities in the roadside environmental plan require people power. We have already mentioned tree planting, weeding and litter reduction as activities which can be carried out by community volunteers. Volunteers provide a valuable contribution, however they will require encouragement and coordination (including considerations of insurance cover) from your organisation. Benefits of having members of the community go far beyond awareness raising. Volunteers make a valuable financial contribution to the maintenance and management of roadsides.

There are many organisations which use roadsides or have an interest in their management. Gas, Electricity and telecommunication suppliers may contribute to implementation. County Councils certainly need to be involved. Fire planning and protection assistance is available through fire control officers and the local bush fire management committee. In areas sensitive to fire, the committee may wish to make special provision for protection in their operations and fuel management plans.

The savings in reducing maintenance costs through community work and efficiencies within your organisation can be allocated to activities outlined in the plan. Savings in reduced mowing, weed control and crisis control accrue over many years.

Another source of financial help is through grants. The National Heritage Trust and its successors have provided funds for many kinds of natural resource management planning and related activities. There are various other grants available for specific purposes from both Commonwealth and State government. Talk to your local Catchment Management Authority about opportunities for funding.

Sponsorship can contribute to implementation of the plan. This can be in the form of money, goods or in kind support. A local business may supply cash, a supply of garbage bags or the services of a consultant. Generally sponsorship involves promotional benefit to the sponsor. They may wish to be acknowledged

on a sign, or have their name incorporated into promotional material. It is important to determine what the expectations are from both sides to avoid disappointment or dispute later on.

Your organisation may enter into partnerships, where you join with one or more others to achieve a common goal. For example, for a modest up front contribution a shadehouse can be erected at a school contributing to its education program and supplying seedlings for a local landcare group. This is the idea behind Rotary's 'Trees for Survival' program.

Similarly a landcare or community group can become partners in a rehabilitation project. For the cost of some time and access to tools or machinery, a local group can fix a problem common to both.

Reviewing the Plan and maintaining momentum

All plans need to be checked and reviewed to remain relevant and respond to changing conditions. Changes in community attitude may mean the plan no longer satisfies them. Economic changes may make it impossible to achieve some of the goals in the plan. Development and infrastructure requirements will change. A plan not reviewed can become a waste of time and money. It may even cause some negative feelings within the community.

Who's responsible?

Plans have problems if there is no single person responsible for implementation. If there is a problem there needs to be a person who can respond and be answerable. The responsible may not necessarily be from your organisation – it may be a representative from an interested group or organisation. Establishing a coordinating group with a small number of people from different organisations or groups may be better suited to manage the program, however a single person needs to be identified as leader.

Reviewing the Plan

After one or two years it is a good idea to formally review the plan. This will provide you with a way of ensuring the plan remains flexible and workable. Adjustments to time lines, changing community expectations or changes in conditions of the roadside environment are common. Review the elements of the plan:

Is there any additional information that needs to be incorporated?

Are the management categories (A, B, C) still relevant?

Have all the special management areas been identified and managed appropriately?

Are there new issues that haven't been considered?

Is the map still accurate and relevant?

Are the policies and guidelines workable? Are they being implemented?

Have work practices changed? Do we need more training?

Is there new legislation to be considered?

Does the community know about the plan? Have they responded?

Is the community running out of energy? What can we do?

Maintaining momentum

After a period of time with any project there is a decline in energy levels, both within your organisation and the wider community. To ensure the plan does not fade from public view there needs to be periodic activity.

Communication and promotion are the key elements in maintaining momentum. The plan should be open and responsive to new ideas. Keep everyone informed of any progress with the plan. Distribute it widely and invite responses. Let people know early that a review will be undertaken at a specific time.

Responses from interested people can be incorporated into your review. Publish the review and acknowledge those involved. Make sure any successes or activities are promoted in the media. Holding a clean up or tree planting helps focus people on the roadside and the plan

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For more information

If you would like more information on roadside planning and management, funding opportunities for projects, or contacts within other organisations please contact the Executive Officer of the NSW Roadside Environment Committee.

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