

Approved:



Department of Transportation

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## **WILDFLOWER MANAGEMENT PROGRAM**

### **PURPOSE:**

To increase the visibility and enjoyment of roadside wildflowers and scenic beauty. To effectively manage a diverse mix of roadside native flora and plant communities, and to support naturally occurring and planted wildflowers. To maximize the economic, ecologic, and aesthetic benefits from the State's investment in the roadside wildflower management program. To establish the responsibilities of the Florida Department of Transportation's (Department) Central and District office staffs.

### **AUTHORITY:**

- Sections 20.23(4)(a) and 334.048(3), Florida Statutes (F.S.)

### **REFERENCES:**

- Article II, Section 7(a) Constitution of the State of Florida, Natural Resources and Scenic Beauty
- Section 334.044(5) and (26), Florida Statutes, Department; Powers and Duties
- House Resolution No. 1377, May 29, 1985, declaring that "...increased awareness of the value and beauty of the state's roadways will enable more people to share in their enjoyment of the state..." and "...that the roadways of Florida be hereafter known as 'Paths of Sunshine' in recognition of their significance to the state."
- Highway Beautification Policy, 000-650-011
- 2060 Florida Transportation Plan
- Title 23, Chapter 1, Part 752, U.S. Code, Landscape and Roadside Development
- Title 23, Chapter 3, Section 319, U.S. Code, Landscaping and Scenic Enhancement

### **SCOPE:**

This procedure is to be used by: Office of Maintenance (OOM), the State Transportation Landscape Architect (STLA), District Maintenance Engineers (DME), District Wildflower Coordinators (DWC), District and Central Public Information Offices (PIO), and District Secretaries.

## **BACKGROUND:**

Consistent with the Department's Highway Beautification Policy, the Wildflower Management Program integrates the wildflower management and highway beautification. For nearly 50 years, the Department has sustained the State's oldest and most visible wildflower program.

In 1999 with support from the Department, the Florida Legislature authorized the production and sale of the Florida Wildflower License Plate. Thereafter, the Florida Wildflower Foundation was established. Using proceeds from the sale of the plate, the Florida Wildflower Foundation has become a supporting partner with the Department.

Revenues from the sale of the Wildflower License Plate have allowed the Florida wildflower seed production and wildflower discovery, viewing, and tourism industries to be established and flourish, making wildflowers a growing part of the state's economy.

## **1. DEFINITIONS**

**1.1** Wildflower: A native or other desirable plant with conspicuous flowers. For the purpose of this procedure the definition does not include trees and other woody plants.

**1.2** Florida Native Wildflower: As defined by the Florida Wildflower Foundation, [http://www.flawildflowers.org/resources/pdfs/pdf10/wildflower\\_definition.pdf](http://www.flawildflowers.org/resources/pdfs/pdf10/wildflower_definition.pdf) . For the purposes of this procedure, some desirable nonnative wildflower species that have become naturalized along roadsides will be treated as a Florida Native Wildflower.

**1.3** Wildflower Areas (): Those areas within the right of way consisting of naturally occurring, restored, or planted native flora; some showy, some not so showy. Some will require no exceptional care other than carefully timed site and species specific mowing practices. These areas may also be locations where there is a desire or opportunity to manage naturalized species, or a desire to establish or restore native wildflower meadows by sowing seed. Due to the nature of wild species and constantly changing environmental conditions, showiness and diversity of species will be variable.

## **2. PROGRAM COORDINATION**

**2.1** Wildflower Management Program activities throughout the Department are an integral part of the Highway Beautification Program. The State Transportation

Landscape Architect (STLA) and the Office of Maintenance (OOM) are responsible for the Wildflower Management Program. District Wildflower Coordinators (DWC) assigned by the District Maintenance Engineer (DME) will be responsible for roadside wildflower management activities, which may include planting and other duties assigned by the DME. The DWC shall have knowledge of Florida native plants and plant communities and appropriate roadside management practices.

**2.2** OOM and STLA will coordinate the activities of the DWCs to assist with implementing and updating roadside vegetation management plans. OOM will update the Department's ***Guide to Roadside Vegetation Management*** as needed to implement this procedure.

**2.3** STLA will fulfill statewide intergovernmental and interagency responsibilities, as well as coordination with statewide nongovernmental organizations including the Florida Wildflower Foundation.

**2.4** State Vegetation Management Specialist/Horticulturist (SVMS) will assist with District and Central Office Wildflower Management Program activities.

### **3. MANAGEMENT OF WILDFLOWER AREAS**

**3.1** Throughout the state, managing naturally occurring roadside wildflowers areas is the preferred means of increasing the abundance, visibility, and enjoyment of wildflowers. Wildflower Areas will be managed to minimize the effects of routine roadside maintenance activities.

**3.2** A wildflower area can be identified anytime. Determining the start and end points and shape of a wildflower area for maintenance and management purposes will be the responsibility of the DWC and the DME. Statewide analysis of Florida Natural Areas Inventory (FNAI) data may also be useful. DWC and DME will include identified wildflower area locations in the District Vegetation Management Plan.

**3.2.1** Wildflower Areas (WAs) can be established on roadsides in each FDOT District. WAs will be delineated with roadside signs or maps prepared by the District. Mowing equipment operators and their supervisors, as well as the District Maintenance Rating Program team, must know the location of WAs. A statewide process will be developed to document the location, condition, and seasonal variation of WAs.

**3.2.2** Determining appropriate locations and extents of WAs requires a combination of engineering and scientific judgment and expertise.

**3.2.3** Volunteers, consultants, and Department employees with knowledge and interest of local flora can be valuable sources of information for identifying plants and WA locations. The Department website and [Florida Wildflower Foundation website](#) is a way for anyone to provide information and to suggest locations for a WA.

**3.2.4** WAs can be within and beyond the routine mowing limits established by the [Department's \*Guide for Roadside Vegetation Management\*](#).

**3.2.5** For motorist safety, a WA will typically not be within 15 feet of the edge of pavement or to the toe of the slope, whichever is less. However, where safe, and where the characteristics within the WA necessitate, this distance may be less than 15 ft. This distance may be greater than or less than 15 ft. due to site conditions, the type or classification of roadway, sight distances, and speed limits. Frequent mowing of this safety zone is considered necessary to maintain a safe roadway and roadside. Within and beyond this safety zone, the size and shape of the WAs will be managed to simplify maintenance. Reduced mowing frequencies are intended to promote growth of existing wildflower and plant communities, allow desirable species to migrate, and enhance aesthetic quality.

**3.2.6** There is no minimum or maximum size or extent for a WA.

**3.2.7** Due to the seasonal and short-lived nature of native plants and wildflowers, many species are not always visible. Care will be taken to be aware of these species when determining the size and shape of a WA. Proximity to the plants' natural habitat (as documented by the FNAI), and other scientific and anecdotal evidence can assist in identifying appropriate locations for WAs. The list of undesirable species used in determining Maintenance Rating Program (MRP) score will be studied by the Department to make sure the list and the procedure are compatible.

**3.2.8** Consistent with the management objectives above, WAs can be located anywhere necessary to increase the visibility and enjoyment of roadside wildflowers and the scenic beauty and aesthetic benefits from the State's investment in the roadside wildflower program.

**3.3** STLA will develop webpage content for OOM to place information and a link to [Florida Wildflower Foundation](#) on the Department's website and provide other guidance and information for the public. A wildflower areas resolution similar to the model resolution found on the Florida Wildflower Foundation website, followed by a written request to the DAC that specifies locations and mowing schedule, extents, and width is the most effective means for municipalities and counties to request that the Department establish a WA, or modify mowing frequency or limits. Such resolutions will be subject to review and concurrence from the DME and DWC for WAs proposed within the Department's right of way.

**3.4** STLA with OOM, DWCs, and SVMS will develop guidance for planning and implementing best management practices to facilitate natural regeneration of planted wildflowers and management and care of WAs. DWC and DME will include any WA locations as well as applicable specific, adaptive management plans and schedules in the District Vegetation Management Plan. Seasonal monitoring and documentation of WAs can help determine the appropriate best management practices.

**3.4.1** WAs will be managed to accommodate safety and operational requirements as the integrity of the transportation facility is paramount.

**3.4.2** Roadside vegetation management practices will enhance the appearance and performance of WAs, including the control of woody and weedy species that make a WA appear to be unkempt.

**3.4.3** Desirable outcomes include increasing the extent, species diversity, and showiness of native plants and wildflowers.

**3.4.4** The DWC in coordination with the DME will ensure that mowing frequencies for identified wildflower areas are included in the District Vegetation Management Plan and appropriate maintenance contractor documents. In addition, these documents will reflect that herbicide application within 100 feet of any identified WA shall be coordinated with the DWC.

## 4. PURCHASING AND PLANTING WILDFLOWER SEEDS

**4.1** OOM and SVMS will develop statewide best practices for wildflower seed purchase, selection of experienced contractors, planting, and management, with emphasis and preference for seeds of available Florida ecotypes of native wildflowers.

**4.2** DWC, with input from SVMS available upon request, will prepare an annual District wildflower planting plan. The written or graphic plan describes locations to be planted and identifies species, quantities of seed, schedule, methods, and equipment needed to fulfill the plan. The schedule shall include an adaptive management plan with a timetable for maintenance activities. There is no minimum or maximum area or quantity of seed that needs to be planted. The wildflower planting plan should be available for review by the STLA annually by June 30.

**4.3** OOM will develop and implement an annual schedule to coordinate with DWCs to purchase seed used to supplement and support each Districts planting plan. All seed shall be purchased by scientific (Latin) name. To the extent allowed by law, and to the extent quality seed is available, Florida ecotypes of native wildflower seed shall be purchased from Florida sources.

**4.4** OOM will coordinate with the seed production industry to increase the value, quality, and availability of Florida ecotypes of native wildflowers, including but not limited to Florida ecotypes of Goldenmane Tickseed (*Coreopsis basalis*) and Multi-Colored Annual Phlox (*Phlox drummondii*).

**4.5** DWC will coordinate with Maintenance Yards and Operations Centers to plant wildflower seed in accordance with District wildflower planting plan, and where necessary to supplement or replace displaced wildflowers, and to respond to requests from local agencies.

**4.6** Where Federal-aid highway funds participate in any landscape project, at least one quarter of one percent of funds expended for such projects must be used to plant native wildflower or grass seeds or seedlings or both (***Title 23, Chapter 3, Section 319, U.S. Code, Landscaping and Scenic Department Enhancement***). STLA will develop a method to track expenditures.

## 5. EVALUATION AND DOCUMENTATION

**5.1** STLA with input from District wildflower and maintenance experts will develop a template for DWCs to annually document and evaluate the establishment and management of WAs. The documentation and evaluation can be used to develop and improve the District Vegetation Management Plan.

**5.2** STLA will develop and recommend to OOM a simple and effective method to evaluate the condition of WAs.

**5.3** OOM and STLA will develop a statewide process for documenting and delineating locations of WAs.

**5.4** As may be needed, District Roadside Vegetation Management Plans meeting the requirements of the Department's ***Roadway and Roadside Maintenance Procedure No. 850-000-015*** will be updated to include the District wildflower planting plan and location and management of WAs. Plans will list the name and contact information of the DWC.

**5.5** The STLA and SVMS will, upon request from DWC, review and provide comments on all draft plans.

## 6. PUBLIC INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION

**6.1** Public comments and questions about the planting, establishment, and management of wildflowers areas will be directed to the DWCs or STLA.

**6.2** OOM and STLA will maintain a Department Wildflower Areas Management web page, [www.dot.state.fl.us/statemaintenanceoffice/wildflowersinfo.shtm](http://www.dot.state.fl.us/statemaintenanceoffice/wildflowersinfo.shtm) and other informative materials. The webpage will include a directory of DWCs. To the extent allowed by law, production and distribution of seed packets, posters, brochures, and other means of public information about wildflowers may be used.

**6.3** DME or District PIO may assign staff to photograph Wildflower Areas. Digital copies of photographs will be made available to STLA and Central PIO and may be posted on Department websites.

**6.4** OOM, STLA, and DWCs are encouraged to reach out to organizations with interest and expertise in wildflowers, including the Florida Wildflower Foundation, Florida Wildflower Cooperative, Florida Federation of Garden Clubs, Florida Association of Native Nurseries, and Florida Native Plant Society.

## **7. ELLA P. WOOD PATHS OF SUNSHINE AWARD**

**7.1** The Ella P. Wood Paths of Sunshine Awards Program was launched in 1985 by the Florida Federation of Garden Clubs, Inc. (FFGC). The FFGC award program recognizes Department units of personnel, local governments, and private contractors responsible for planting and/or management of roadside wildflowers and/or native plants on the State Highway System. Competition rules are available from the FFGC at [www.ffgc.org](http://www.ffgc.org)

**7.2** Nominations submitted by FFGC to STLA, and any other nominations submitted by Department work units, will be forwarded to the appropriate District Secretary. The District Secretary will select any number of the nominated areas within the District that represent the most outstanding displays of wildflowers and/or native plants on District roadsides. As instructed by the District Secretary, the nominated work unit shall prepare documentation for the selected sections of highway managed by unit employees. For the purposes of this procedure, Department work units include asset maintenance contractors. The District PIO should be available to assist with the preparation of documentation. Documentation for sections of highway managed by private contractors or local governments are not to be prepared by the District.

**7.3** The District shall send documentation directly to the FFGC in accordance with the competition rules.

**7.4** When STLA is notified that finalists include Department employees, STLA will notify Department finalists, PIO, and appropriate District Secretary, DWC, and District PIO about the date, time, and location of the award ceremony.

**7.5** At least one representative from each finalist work unit should attend the FFGC award ceremony.

**7.6** OOM or STLA should represent the Central Office at the FFGC Awards Ceremony. Ceremony attendees shall comply with the [\*Disbursement Handbook for Employees and Managers\*](#), Events (Banquets and Other Social Activities).



**7.7** Documentation for each of the winners' entries will be maintained by the STLA.

**7.8** Awards received by the Department will be temporarily displayed at the annual FFGC Awards Ceremony, and subsequently displayed in the District or State Headquarters.

## **8. TRAINING**

No training is required.

## **9. FORMS**

None