

Overhead utilities



Utility companies play a large role in determining the health and composition of roadside vegetation.

Understanding where your utility companies work and how they schedule their roadside pruning and clearing rotations will help town residents plan for changes in the structure



of roadside fields and forests over time. Additionally, towns and private landowners may find unique opportunities to partner with utility companies to plant small trees, shrubs, grasses, or crops within the guidelines of the vegetation management plans of the companies.

Identifying the presence or impact of overhead utilities within the right-of-way tells us:

- where landowners can be alerted to the practices implemented by the utility company servicing their road.
- where landowners may see an increased number of ash tree removals as utility companies manage for emerald ash borer and the decline of ash trees.
- where the town may rely on the utility company for assistance in cutting trees that are showing signs of decline or decay.
- where private landowners mowing under utility lines may adjust practices to promote low-growing plants and shrubs that may help filter stormwater runoff, increase plant diversity, delineate the road edge, and increase visual interest along roadsides.
- where there are roads not impacted by overhead utilities, offering more opportunity for established forestry practices.

Line clearing drastically changed the appearance and purpose of this roadside hedgerow. Planning for low-growing vegetation beneath the power line ensures homeowner privacy and reduces conflicts between utility line placement and trees.



ABOVE LEFT *Japanese knotweed, dead elm trees, and ash trees surround this utility corridor between a road and a river. Any tree work done to remove elm or ash should consider the likely spread of Japanese knotweed fragments via road or tree felling equipment.*

ABOVE RIGHT *Cyclic clearing of utility line vegetation creates dense and even-aged regeneration beneath an overhead line.*



Recommendations

Work with the local utility companies to understand their clearing rotation. Identify where town and utility company priorities overlap and where to follow [cooperative management strategies](#).¹

Understand the utility company's approach to managing invasive plants, particularly Japanese knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*) and other fast-growing plants that can obscure sight lines and signs.

Ensure that preserved trees near utility lines are structurally sound and that sight lines remain clear as the understory becomes dense.

Promote vegetated buffers of grasses and revegetate disturbed areas with native seed mixtures.

Keep yourself and your equipment at least 10 feet away from overhead utility lines. Treat all power lines as energized. Never cut or prune trees within 10 feet of an overhead utility and never attempt to remove trees or limbs from a utility line. Consult the Green Mountain Power [Safety Tips](#)² for more information or contact your local utility company.

Call 888-DIG-SAFE at least 48 hours before you excavate or dig holes. Dig Safe is a free and legally required service that alerts you to any underground utilities in the area.

Resources

1. Polanin, Nicholas and Mark Vodak, *Trees & Utilities: Cooperative Management Strategies for Success* (2002), bit.ly/Rutgers_TreesAndUtilities.
2. "Safety Tips," Green Mountain Power, bit.ly/GMP_SafetyTips.