

Develop a roadside mowing policy



With Vermont’s warm and lush summers comes expansive plant growth. Many Vermont roadsides, if left undisturbed, will grow green and spill into the roadways.

Road crews and subcontractors routinely mow the right-of-way to delineate the edge of the road and the size and shape of the shoulder and ditch. In the process, they create a place for vehicles to safely pull off the road and room to store snow.

However, roadside construction, maintenance, and mowing carries invasive plant seeds and fragments to other road segments and onto private property. Becoming aware of the most

common roadside invasive plants in your region allows towns to learn where, when, and how to perform roadside mowing that reduces invasive plant spread. Develop a mowing policy in tandem with updated and improved mowing procedures to minimize the labor and cost involved in mowing, increase safety, manage snow drift, and reduce the spread of invasive plant species that degrade native ecosystems.

Recommendations

Plan mowing widths based on safety requirements and the width of mowing machinery. Wide mowed right-of-ways require multiple passes on the mower, adding expense and disturbing native vegetation. Along Vermont backroads, mowed zones next to the traveled surface of the road are often a minimum of five feet wide.

Clean mowing equipment often. Note which road segments currently exhibit few or no invasive plant species and make sure that all mowing equipment is thoroughly cleaned before mowing, digging, or ditching in these locations.

Know that it is illegal to buy, sell, or transport invasive plants or plant fragments on the Vermont list. Towns should create management plans that address the movement of invasive plants or plant fragments during roadside construction, prioritizing prevention of new infestations through soil or plant movement. Contact the Agency of Agriculture for guidance on management activities and creating a management plan for [invasive and noxious weeds](#)¹ along municipal roads.

Determine if any roadsides should not be mowed and designate these areas with clear signs. No-mow contingencies may be due to steeply sloping roadsides, the proximity of a wetland or other water

1. "Invasive & Noxious Weeds in Vermont," Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets, bit.ly/VT_NoxiousWeeds.

body, or the presence of invasive species easily spread by mowing. Avoid mowing backslopes of ditches.

Consider mowing more than once a season to maintain sight lines while reducing the spread of invasive plant seeds or fragments. After mowing, many invasive plants will grow and flower again in the same season – be sure the mow before this subsequent round of flowering goes to seed.

Allow vegetation to be 10–12 inches high by the end of the growing season to [protect native plants from winter damage](#)² as outlined on page 17 of the *Best Practices Handbook for Roadside Vegetation Management* by the Minnesota Local Roads Research Board.

Learn about pesticide safety and application in Vermont,³ particularly in the right-of-way. Any pesticide use must be administered by a certified pesticide applicator who holds a Category 6 license for Right-of-Way Vegetation Management.

For more information on reducing the spread of invasive plants along roadsides, see [Best Management Practices for Roadside Invasive Plants](#),⁴ released by The Nature Conservancy, and guidance from the [Roadside Vegetation Management Unit](#)⁵ at the Vermont Agency of Transportation.

Do not mow invasive plants after seeds have set. Knowing when invasive plants bloom will let you use mowing to your advantage to reduce the spread of invasive seeds. Learn more about mitigating common roadside invasive plants on page 30.

2. Minnesota Local Road Research Board, *Best Practices Handbook for Roadside Vegetation Management*, bit.ly/MinnesotaRoadsides.

3. "Pesticide Programs," Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets, bit.ly/VT_PesticidePrograms.

4. The Nature Conservancy, *Best Management Practices for Roadside Invasive Plants*, bit.ly/TNC_RoadsideInvasives.

5. "Roadside Vegetation Management Unit," Vermont Agency of Transportation, bit.ly/AOT_VegManagement.

Understanding herbicide treatment in the right-of-way

Selective herbicide treatment can be an effective way to control invasive plant populations. Towns considering herbicide application in the municipal right-of-way must follow a two-step process outlined by the Vermont Agency of Agriculture.

Apply for a right-of-way [pesticide permit](#)¹ reviewed by Agency of Agriculture staff under advice from the Vermont Pesticide Advisory Council. Provide the project location, work date range, and name of the proposed herbicide. To add context to the permit application, include any municipally approved integrated roadside vegetation management

plan. Permits are valid for one year; towns must reapply for a permit to continue, change, or expand a scope of work in the same defined area during a subsequent year.

Ensure that herbicide application in the right-of-way is completed by a contractor or town employee who has passed the Vermont Core Pesticide Applicator Certification exam and the Category 6 Right-of-Way Vegetation Management exam. [Learn more](#)² about the necessary study guides, exam schedule, and fees from the Pesticide Program in the Vermont Agency of Agriculture.

The Vermont Agency of Transportation holds permits for pesticide application along state road right-of-ways. Contact the [Right of Way & Utilities Program](#)³ with the Agency of Transportation Highway Division for more information about the processes and plans involved in use of pesticides in these locations.

Any questions regarding pesticide application and the relevant certifications should be directed to the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, (802) 828-2430 or AGR.Helpdesk@vermont.gov.

1. "Pesticide Permits," Vermont Agency of Agriculture, bit.ly/Vermont_PesticidePermits.

2. "Applicator Types & Resources," Vermont Agency of Agriculture, bit.ly/Vermont_PesticideApplicatorTypes.

3. "Right of Way & Utilities," Vermont Agency of Transportation, bit.ly/VTrans_ROW.