

ROADSIDE TURF MANAGEMENT PLAN

THIRD DISTRICT

January 2018

The purpose of this statement is to help create a more uniform program of turf management within the Third District of the Florida Department of Transportation. The goal is to provide healthy, managed turf within the transportation corridor as it provides a safe zone for recovery of errant and disabled vehicles, filters runoff water, and is generally good for the environment. Good managed turf will effectively control erosion, absorb pollutants and provide a pleasing landscape feature for the motoring public. The three basic criteria to be considered when planning roadside turf are, in order of importance: safety, functionality, and aesthetics.

The concepts of preventative maintenance shall be incorporated into the turf management program with the principle tools being mowing on planned cycles, mowing at appropriate heights, selective herbicide applications, aeration, and selective fertilization (including agricultural lime).

Mowing for weed control and maintenance of turf height shall be in planned cycles, and performed as outlined in the "Guide for Roadside Vegetation Management." Generally, mowing cycles and heights should be planned so that no more than one third of the leaf blades are removed at any one time. In addition to guidance outlined in the "Guide for Roadside Vegetation Management," each Operations Center Manager shall monitor winter weeds and consult with the District Vegetation Management Specialist to determine if there is a need to issue a mowing work document on February 1ST with the intent of cleaning up winter weeds. Subsequently, and no later than March 10th, the Operations Center Manager and the District Vegetation Management Specialist shall jointly determine the need to issue a mowing work document with the intent of suppressing rye grass from going to seed.

A safety strip of 15 feet will be mowed from edge of pavement and shall be mowed every time a work document is issued with the exception of SR 65. All management plans that have been developed for District Three include a 15 foot safety strip provision with the exception of SR 65. This 15 foot wide safety strip is necessary to address the primary safety needs and requirements of roadside vegetation management while also taking into account the secondary goals of establishing natural and environmentally sustainable vegetative communities. Such a balanced approach is required to ensure that safety is not compromised. In sections of the right-of-way where Wildflower Area signs are present, due diligence will be taken by mowing contractors/subcontractors to maintain the safety strip while disturbing as little of the wildflowers as feasible.

Wildflowers are included as part of vegetation management activities, and are managed for proliferation and maximum bloom. Timing of mowing cycles is an excellent tool for both native and cultivated wildflower management. Seasonal mowing of the full right of way may occur outside the limits of regular mowing. This activity may be done during the late spring/early summer (lightning season) to suppress summer weeds and distribute seeds of desirable wildflowers, and/or during the late fall/early winter (dormant season) to suppress woody vegetation and distribute seeds of desirable fall blooming wildflowers, thus multiplying the seed

bank of wildflowers. Areas where significant stands of naturally occurring wildflowers exist will be identified and given special consideration as wildflower management sites and designated with the appropriate Wildflower Area Signs. The District Vegetation Management Specialist shall be consulted for assistance in identifying those areas and scheduling full right of way mowing.

Aeration may be performed as needed in areas of heavy or compacted soils. Sites supporting a dormant season stand of leguminous cover crops such as crimson clover in the roadside turf will not require aeration as often as the monoculture sites. Efforts shall be made in the planning stages to consider cool season legumes as highly desirable for nitrogen fixation and soil aeration. Blooming during April and May, crimson clover provides a colorful spring show for the motoring public with its attractive color and helps reduce driver fatigue on the interstate system.

The District encourages selective application of herbicides as part of the turf management program. Chemical control of undesirables shall be site specific and applied by licensed applicators that have received training on all herbicide policies of the Department. Through the Florida Invasive Species Partnership (FISP), this District is working with the local county extension offices and others in areas where there are exotic invasive plants such as Cogon, Johnson, Torpedo, and Smut grasses located on adjacent properties, to further eradicate these species from the state rights of way. The State Maintenance Engineer, as per existing policy, approves broadcast applications. The intent of this management tool is to contain, and eradicate if possible, the spreading of noxious plants, trees, and shrubs which are referred to as “exotic invasive plants” by the Department of Environmental Protection and the Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council. Those plants identified for particular eradication, including broad leaf weeds and woody vegetation, are: Cogon, Johnson, Torpedo, and Smut grasses, Tropical Soda Apple, Chinese Privet, Mimosa, Chinaberry, Chinese Tallowtree, Kudzu, Chinese Yam, Japanese Honeysuckle, and Japanese Climbing Fern. Surveys should be conducted semi-annually in spring and late summer to locate and map the occurrence of these species on the District’s rights of way. Programs to control these species will be as found in the District Three Exotic Invasive Plants Field Guide, or best management practice as recommended by the District Vegetation Management Specialist. The District Vegetation Management Specialist shall produce an annual report each January for submittal to the District Maintenance Engineer. Fertilizer and liming applications will be based on soil testing and practical recommendation of the District Vegetation Management Specialist. The Guide for Roadside Vegetation Management addresses these issues in more detail and shall be referred to as questions arise. The District Vegetation Management specialist shall be consulted in all vegetation management issues that are not fully addressed in this guide prior to seeking guidance from the District Landscape Project Manager.