

Background

Development of this Roadside Classification Plan (RCP) began in 1990 with a review of state roadside policies and procedures by the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) Landscape/Roadside Reorganization Task Force. The Task Force recommended the development of clear policies and guidelines, and the coordination of planning, design, construction, and maintenance activities. This RCP provides those roadside policies and guidelines in coordination with the Transportation Policy Plan for Washington State, the State-wide Multimodal Transportation Plan, and Federal Highway Administration policies (see Appendices).

Policy Statement

It is WSDOT policy to put roadside treatments to use for the protection and restoration of roadside character as designated in the *Roadside Classification Log*, and to incorporate the Roadside Classification Plan into regional and route-specific planning, design, construction, and maintenance programs.

Summary

The intent of the Roadside Classification Plan is to:

- Minimize roadside project construction costs and long-term demands on maintenance resources;
- Provide a consistent and proactive roadside management program;
- Comply with legal obligations and commitments; and
- Protect and restore Washington State's natural environment and heritage resources within state highway roadsides.

The RCP approach to these tasks is based on two premises:

- Long-term roadside management costs will be held at the lowest practical levels through integration of design and maintenance criteria.
- The natural environment and heritage resources contained within the state highway roadsides are valuable to roadside functions and are a conspicuous symbol of Washington State character.

In coordination with the State Highway System Plan, the RCP:

- Sets statewide goals and objectives for roadside management, establishes roadside character classifications, and records roadside character designations in the *Roadside Classification Log*.
- Provides guidelines for roadside restoration.
- Advocates the use of native plants, Integrated Vegetation Management (IVM), and a long-term management approach to achieve sustainable roadsides.

Goals and Objectives

These goals and objectives identify roadside policy direction for WSDOT. The goals and objectives were derived from Landscape/Roadside Reorganization Task Force recommendations, the Transportation Policy Plan for Washington State, and the Statewide Multimodal Transportation Plan. They were reviewed and revised in collaboration with representatives from the offices of Program Management, Transportation Planning, Environmental Affairs, Design, Architecture, Construction, Heritage Corridors, and Highway Maintenance, and the regions.

Goal 1: Promote Transportation Safety and Management Efficiency

- Objective 1.1 Design roadsides for sustainability, emphasizing safety and operational efficiency with minimal ongoing maintenance.
- Objective 1.2 Address common roadside management issues on a statewide basis.
- Objective 1.3 Provide long-term cost-effective measures for roadside management.
- Objective 1.4 Integrate criteria for roadside planning, design, construction, and maintenance.
- Objective 1.5 Define common roadside management concepts and terminology for statewide use.

Goal 2: Minimize Environmental and Social Impacts of Transportation Facility Construction and Maintenance

- Objective 2.1 Minimize roadside disturbances that provide opportunities for the migration and distribution of invasive plants and noxious weeds.
- Objective 2.2 Provide guidelines for restoration of roadside areas disturbed during construction.
- Objective 2.3 Protect and restore native plant communities.
- Objective 2.4 Reduce water pollution through stormwater runoff, erosion control, and slope stabilization measures.
- Objective 2.5 Support preservation and mitigation of wetlands and sensitive areas.
- Objective 2.6 Coordinate wildlife considerations with operational functions.
- Objective 2.7 Buffer adjacent lands from adverse visual and noise impacts from the roadway.
- Objective 2.8 Screen roadway users from visual distractions.
- Objective 2.9 Promote aesthetic harmony and visual continuity within the roadway corridor.

Goal 3: Facilitate Protection and Restoration of Washington’s Natural Environment and Cultural Heritage Within State Highway Roadsides

- Objective 3.1 Coordinate roadside planning, design, construction, and maintenance actions with the natural environment within a statewide, regional, and local context.
- Objective 3.2 Promote biological diversity through the use of native plant communities.
- Objective 3.3 Facilitate documentation and ongoing maintenance of scenic views and mitigation of undesirable views.
- Objective 3.4 Design roadside structures in coordination with the surrounding natural and cultural context.
- Objective 3.5 Address the role of special planning designations, such as Scenic and Recreational Highways, in roadside management.

Goal 4: Promote Cooperation and Communication in Roadside Management

- Objective 4.1 Facilitate departmental, interagency, and public communication by providing consistent roadside management policy.
- Objective 4.2 Cultivate responsiveness to local community and citizen requests for volunteer involvement and community enhancement in selected roadside areas.

Definitions

The following terms are used throughout the RCP. Less frequently used terms are defined in the Glossary (Appendix A).

Integrated Vegetation Management

Integrated Vegetation Management (IVM) is the establishment of low-maintenance beneficial vegetation, and the suppression of unwanted vegetation, through integration of biological, cultural, manual, mechanical, and educational tactics. Chemical controls are used only when needed. Integrated Vegetation Management uses plant growth characteristics, principles of plant succession, and knowledge of natural and human-related factors affecting environmental change to achieve management goals, while minimizing impacts on the environment.

Roadside

The roadside encompasses the area between the roadway pavement edge and right of way boundaries, including unpaved median strips and auxiliary facilities, such as rest areas, roadside parks, viewpoints, historic markers, pedestrian and bicycle facilities, wetland buffer areas, stormwater treatment facilities, park and ride lots, stockpiles, and maintenance storage sites. The Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) is responsible for the stewardship of an estimated 38,500 ha [97,500 acres] of roadsides along the 11,008 kilometers [7,052 miles] of state roadway, including hundreds of auxiliary facilities.

Roadside Character

Roadside character is a description of the roadside landscape from the roadway user's perspective. The RCP uses five roadside character descriptions to document roadside character statewide (see Chapter 3).

Roadside Functions

A roadside function is any activity or role for which the roadside is specifically suited and used. The roadside is managed to fulfill operational, environmental, and visual functions. In reality, these functions are interrelated and inseparable. However, the following three categories help us communicate the scope of roadside management issues.

- Operational functions provide safe, multiuse roadsides. Operational functions include access control, clear zone, sight distance, signing, trails and bikeways, and utility accommodation.
- Environmental functions protect and enhance our natural and built surroundings. Environmental functions include water quality, wetland and sensitive area protection, noxious weed control, noise control, habitat preservation, air quality improvement, and erosion control.
- Visual functions include all functions designed and experienced primarily from a visual perspective. Visual functions overlap with operational and environmental functions. They include positive guidance and navigation, distraction screening, corridor continuity, roadway and adjacent property buffering, and scenic view preservation.

Roadside Management

Roadside management encompasses planning, design, construction, and maintenance of the roadside environment.

Roadside Management Zones

The roadside is comprised of three management zones (see Appendix C):

- Zone 1 (Vegetation Free Zone): Width as necessary to meet operational needs. The width of Zone 1 is limited as much as possible. In most cases the width is 0-2 ft.
- Zone 2 (Operational Zone): Extends from the outside edge of zone 1 to meet operational needs.
- Zone 3 (Transition Zone): Extends from the outside edge of zone 2 to the right of way line.