Roadside Revelations:
How to talk to the public and politicians

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Trees Forever and Steering Committee
Dr. Lynn Manternach
Mindfire Communications

Living Roadway Trust Fund Legislation, 1988
Iowa Code 314.21 Living Roadway Trust Fund
Administered by Iowa DOT; works with partners in Iowa to:
- educate public on the benefits and use of native plants in roadsides
- support roadside programs
Living Roadway Trust Fund Legislation, 1988

1) 3% of REAP funds (Resource Enhancement and Protection Act – gaming receipts, license plate sales)

2) Tax on utility easements

3) Road use tax fund

Formula to allocate money among state, counties, and cities

IRVM Legislation, 1988

Iowa Code 314.22 Integrated Roadside Vegetation Management

1. Objectives. It is declared to be in the general public welfare of Iowa and a highway purpose for the vegetation of Iowa’s roadsides to be preserved, planted, and maintained to be safe, visually interesting, ecologically integrated, and useful for many purposes.
2017: Survey of county conservation board directors and chairs of county board of supervisors

- 98 county conservation board directors
- 99 chairs of county boards of supervisors
Survey Goals

What do county administrators think about county roadside programs?

What are barriers to county participation in county roadside programs?

Methods

Mixed-mode: Online and mail-back survey

Data collected: Spring-Summer 2017

Response rate
Board of Supervisor Chairs, n = 50 (51%)
Conservation Board Directors, n = 63 (64%)
How much impact does each of the following items have on your county’s decisions about roadside vegetation management?

(quite a bit of impact, some impact, very little impact, no impact)

Consideration of aesthetics
Consideration of safety
Invasive species
Maintenance cost savings
Pollinators and other wildlife
Public feedback
Snow control
Soil erosion concerns
Stormwater management regulations
Time spent mowing
Water quality
Largest influences on roadside vegetation management decision-making

1. Consideration of safety

Board of Supervisor Chair

Lynn Betts, USDA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact Level</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No impact</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very little impact</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some impact</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quite a bit of impact</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n=47
Largest influences on roadside vegetation management decision-making

Board of Supervisor Chair

3. Invasive species

Aubrey K. Huggins

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No impact</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some impact</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Maintenance cost savings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No impact</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some impact</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quite a bit of impact</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Largest influences on roadside vegetation management decision-making

Board of Supervisor Chair
5. Snow control

Smaller influences on roadside vegetation management decision-making
6. Water quality
7. Public feedback
8. Time spent mowing
9. Pollinators and other wildlife
10. Stormwater management regulations
11. Consideration of aesthetics
To what degree did the following factor into your county’s decision to hire a roadside manager? (not a factor, limited, factor, significant factor)

- Environmental stewardship
- Federal or state funding opportunities
- Improve my community
- Leadership of local elected officials
- Leadership of local staff
- Potential for fiscal savings
- Providing wildlife habitat
- Public support
- Other (specify)

Top three most significant factors in county’s decision to hire a roadside manager

Board of supervisor chair

1. Improve my community

J.E. Anderson and Associates
Top three most significant factors in county’s decision to hire a roadside manager

Board of supervisor chair

2. Leadership of local staff

- n=19
- 11% 32% 58%

Top three most significant factors in county’s decision to hire a roadside manager

Board of supervisor chair

3. Leadership of local elected officials

- n=21
- 5% 38% 57%
Research Objective:
Understand how typical Iowans, stakeholders and legislators view the Living Roadway Trust Fund.

- Who are our target audiences?
- Which messages resonate?
- How do we best drive support?
Methodology & Survey

Iowa General Population sample: 610 respondents

- The Iowa General Population survey was fielded through Nielsen Opinion Quest to their panel from May 17, 2016 through June 7, 2016.
- Quotas were set to make sure the survey was representative:
  - 50% rural Iowa zip codes (n=304) with 12% farmers (n=70)
  - 50% metro Iowa zip codes (n=306)
  - Stakeholder groups: 839 from 93 counties!
  - 21 Legislators participated

- Total People Surveyed: 1470

Iowans Most Interested

- Highly-engaged *Concerned Country Dwellers* (46% of the sample) tend to live in rural communities and on farms.

- *Discontented Commuters* (39% of the sample) are more likely to live in the suburbs and rural communities.
  - Higher-income professionals
  - Long commutes
  - Care about issues but do not feel a strong sense of pride in the appearance of our roadsides
IOWANS: Top Issues of Concern

• #1 - Loss of habitat critical to bees, butterflies and other pollinators

• Compromised water quality

• The beauty of Iowa as viewed from the roadways

Preferences: The Look

Managed roadside prairie plantings and native landscaping

Mowed grass and landscaped roadsides

Mow roadsides periodically
Preferences: The Look

Considering strictly the look of Iowa roadsides, what are your preferences?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Managed roadside prairie plantings and native landscaping.</th>
<th>Ranked 1st</th>
<th>Ranked 2nd</th>
<th>Ranked 3rd</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Iowans</td>
<td>Stakeholders</td>
<td>Iowans</td>
<td>Stakeholders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mow roadsides periodically for safety, but otherwise leave them alone.</th>
<th>Ranked 1st</th>
<th>Ranked 2nd</th>
<th>Ranked 3rd</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Iowans</td>
<td>Stakeholders</td>
<td>Iowans</td>
<td>Stakeholders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mowed grass and landscaped roadsides with ornamental flowers and plants – make it look as park-like as possible.</th>
<th>Ranked 1st</th>
<th>Ranked 2nd</th>
<th>Ranked 3rd</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Iowans</td>
<td>Stakeholders</td>
<td>Iowans</td>
<td>Stakeholders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: Iowans, n=610, Stakeholders, n=840

Summary of Key Findings

IOWANS: Preference for “The Look”

• No strong preference for Iowans overall
• There is a strong preference among Concerned Country Dwellers and Discontented Commuters for Managed roadside prairie plantings and native landscaping (wildflowers and grasses, native trees, wildlife habitats).
Summary of Key Findings

IOWANS: Priorities for environmental conservation efforts

Concerned Country Dwellers place significantly higher importance on all issues. Three specific interests landed at the top of the list:

1. Supporting pollinators, including bees and butterflies
2. Water quality
3. Conservation of wildlife habitat

STAKEHOLDERS: Resonant Messaging

- Stakeholders need to hear how we champion the specific interests that they already deem vital and actively support.
- Stakeholders strongly support managed prairie plantings and native landscaping along roadsides.
  - Call it Native Plant Restoration

Support will continue to grow as Stakeholders see how roadside Native Plant Restoration actively supports pollinator and wildlife habitat, improved water quality and a better future for generations of Iowans to come!
Roadside Pride
As an Iowan, does the appearance of our state as reflected by the condition of our roadides make you proud of our state?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Iowans</th>
<th>Stakeholders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very proud</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat proud</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maybe a little proud</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not really proud</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all proud</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: Iowans, n=610, Stakeholders, n=840

Environmental Conservation in Iowa
As an Iowan, are you satisfied with our state’s efforts at environmental conservation?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Iowans</th>
<th>Stakeholders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very satisfied</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat satisfied</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maybe a little satisfied</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not really satisfied</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all satisfied</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: Iowans, n=610, Stakeholders, n=840
Iowans: Likelihood to Support

How likely are you to support efforts to address the following?

- Very likely
- Likely
- Neutral
- Unlikely
- Very unlikely

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Likely</th>
<th>Very likely</th>
<th>Unlikely</th>
<th>Very unlikely</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Loss of pollinator habitat</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compromised water caused by runoff</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iowa last in U.S for % of original natural habitat</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A decreasing presence of native plants</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roadside mgmt. that doesn’t interfere with crop producers</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: Iowans, n=610

Summary of Key Findings

- Legislators rate saving taxpayer money higher than water quality, pollinator support and conservation of wildlife habitats.
  - Farm/rural legislators rated saving taxpayer money as a higher priority than other legislators.

- Takeaway: Focus on water quality and how roadside restoration initiatives save money!
Legislators Want Cost Effectiveness Above All

Generally prefer the look of managed roadside plantings

How to Talk About Our Work

Most Preferred:

Native Plant Restoration
Native Landscaping
Beautifying Roadsides for the future

Least Preferred:
Integrated Roadside Vegetation (IRVM)
The Answer: Change Our Language!

Talk about:
- Native Plant Restoration
- Native Landscaping and Beautification
- Beautiful Iowa Roadways

Benefits:
- Cost savings
- Water quality
- Pollinator habitat
- Our future

Thank you!

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