



Iowa Roadside Management Successes and what could be better

Joy Williams,
Vegetation Management Agronomist
Roadside Development Section
Office of Design
Ames IA 50010
515-233-7729

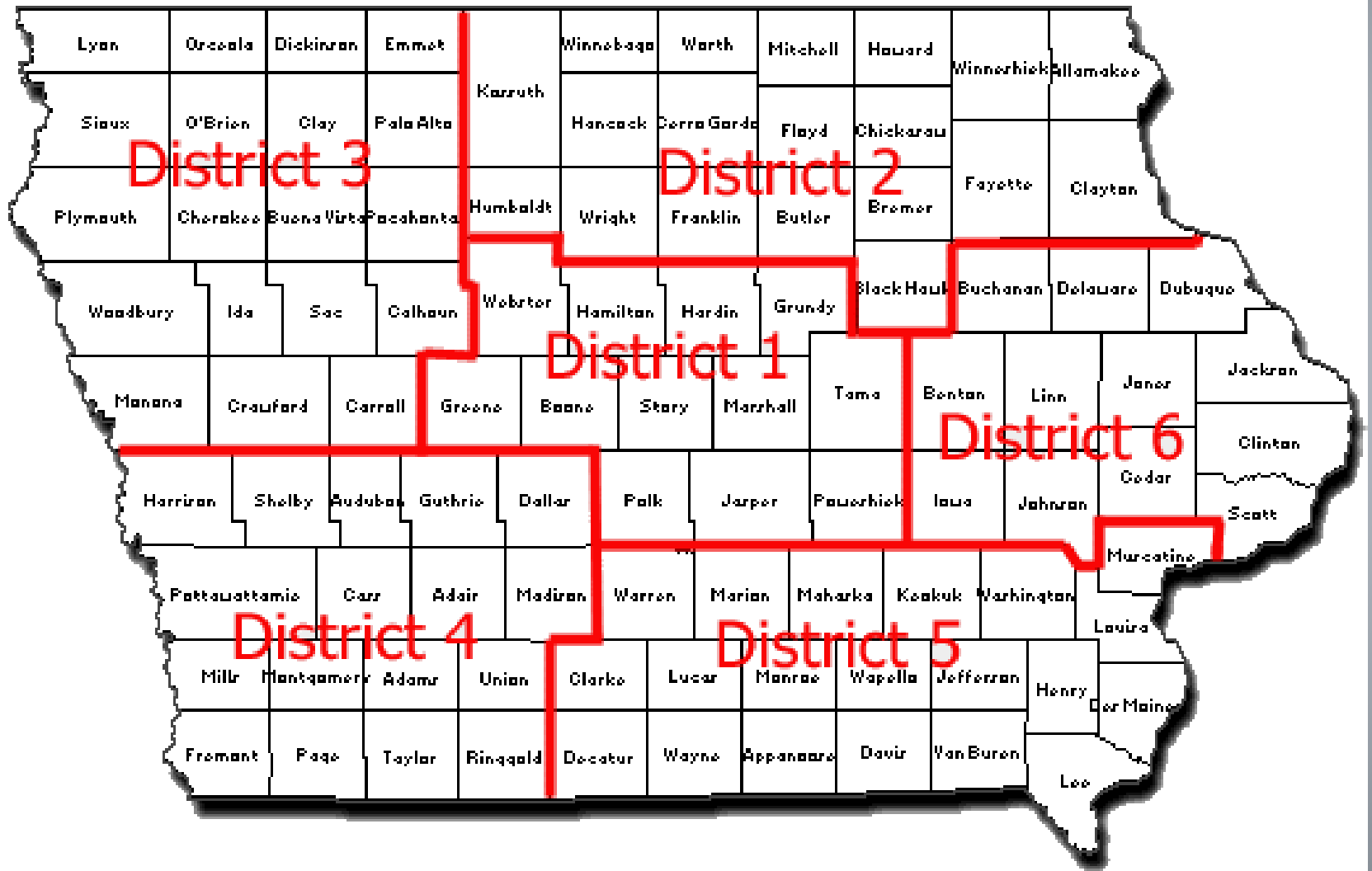
joy.williams@dot.iowa.gov

- Hired in Maintenance as a program manager
 - Facilitate Roadside Coordinator Program
 - Conduct pesticide applicator training for > 500 in-house equipment operators
 - Evaluate feasibility of contract spraying and mowing
- Moved to Roadside Development Section in Design in a major reorganization 2002
 - Now just “Technical resource as requested”
 - Work with Landscaping project designers
 - Herbicide specialist (select products, evaluate bids, etc.)
 - Claim investigation for anything vegetation related
 - Single point state contact for anything weed and brush
 - Haying policy and mowing law
 - Tree and brush control (emerald ash borer, etc.)
 - The “weed and wildflower lady”

Responsible for interstates and primary highways

- 9,378 miles of roadway and ramps
- 230,00 plus acres of right-of-way



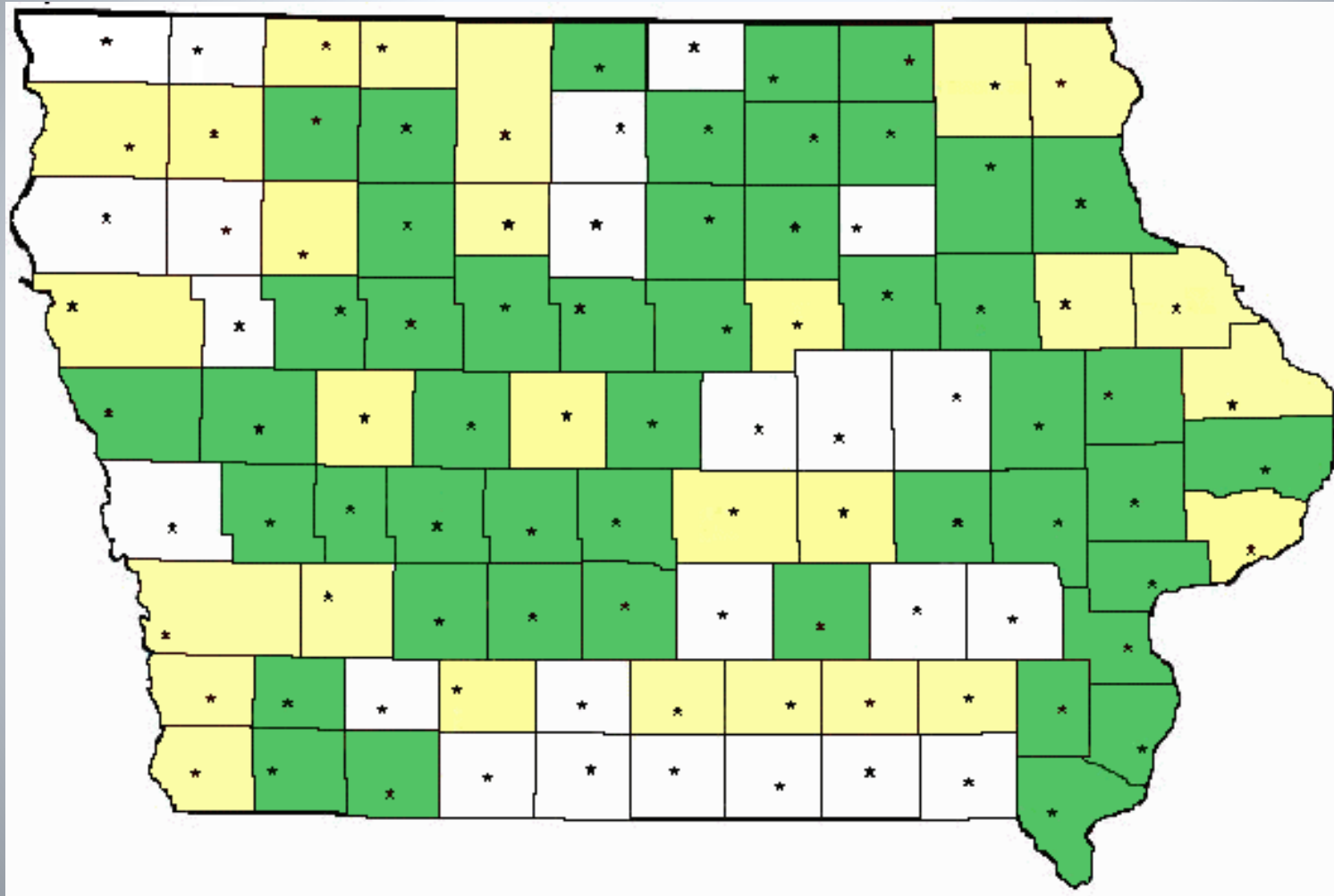


Iowa's Roadside Program

- County programs
- History of the Iowa Roadside Program
- Burning to promote native vegetation
- Living Roadway Trust Fund
- Other Funding Sources
- Landscaping and revegetation projects (kill out brome/fescue with glyphosate, seed to natives)
- Decreased DOT workforce, other priorities
- Contracting
- Farmer Haying



Under Secondary Roads or Co. Conservation Dept.



County Roadside Programs – Huge Success

- Chris Henze – Johnson Co. Roadside Manager
 - Iowa City and surrounding area
- Rob Roman – Linn Co. Roadside Manager
 - Cedar Rapids/Marion area
- Kristine Nemic – Roadside Program Coordinator
 - University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls
 - Tallgrass Prairie Center

Difference between County and State

County

- Hires people with natural resource degrees, primary job is vegetation management
- Job description very inclusive about grant writing, budget management, people skills
- Report to County Engineer or Conservation Director, ultimately to elected Board of Supervisors
- Supervises staff and seasonal laborers, technical support from UNI Roadside Program,
- Funding supplemented by grants from DOT (LRTP, TAP)

DOT

- Hires equipment operators whose primary job is snow and ice control, edge rut repair, sealing, construction inspection.
- Job description favors people with agriculture Coop spraying background
- Report to 3 layers, ultimately District Engineer (at will position, Governor can fire without cause)
- Technical support – resource “as requested,” no budget
- Saddled with administering grants and promotion of native vegetation

Funding Sources

County

- Operation budget from property tax
- Grants from Living Roadway Trust fund
- Seed from Transportation and Grant administered by UNI Roadside Program at Tallgrass Prairie Center

DOT

- DOT/DNR fund
 - 3 million. Cut back 1 million.
 - Use for landscaping projects
 - Herbicide before project and up to 4 years after letting for establishment purposes
- Project funds
- Very little use of LRTF grants but saddled with administration.

Living Roadway Trust Fund LRTF

Key to success of County programs

- 3% of REAP funds (20 million Resource Enhancement and Protection Act, never fully funded)
- Tax on utility easements
- Road Use Fuel funds
- This year - \$884,000 available
- Formula splits for Statewide, County and Municipality

LRTF Grants fund

- UNI Roadside Program Coordinator position
- Promotional and educational materials
 - Posters
 - Books,
- Research and demonstration
- Equipment
 - Seeders
 - Burn equipment
 - Sprayers
 - Computer
- Inventory
 - GPS equipment and software

Why doesn't the DOT burn?

Iowa county roadside managers
burn and get supplies through LRTF
Minnesota DOT burns

Some people just go ahead
and burn along state
highways without permission



DOT does not burn liability, insurance and willingness to take safety risks



- Chapter 669 State Tort Claims
 - ➔ **No cap on state's liability in Iowa**
 - There is cap on state's liability in Minnesota
 - If an accident occurred from smoke on the road, DOT could be sued for unlimited amount.
- Iowa DOT is self-insured.
- Contractors required to be bonded and carry high insurance coverage.
- There is risk in everything the DOT does. Need to establish cost/benefit ratio, expertise and experience before convincing.
- Current Zero Fatality initiative



DOT has allow individuals to burn by permit through an “Application to Perform Work Within State Highway Right-a-way” agreement that we use with utility companies

Liability Stipulation:

“The applicant shall (defend), indemnify and save harmless the State of Iowa, its agencies, and employees, from any and all causes or actions, suits at law or in equity, for losses, damages, claims, or demands, and from any and all liability and expense of whatever nature, arising out of or in connection with the applicant’s use or occupancy of the public highway.”



So why is the DOT seeding native grasses and wildflowers if it cannot burn? Revegetation Projects
Native grasses + wildflower mix –40 plus species



Use haying and mowing as poor substitute for burning



2010 Mowing Legislation

Prompted by low pheasant population



2010 Mowing Law



- Prohibits mowing and haying until **after July 15** on primary **and secondary** roads
- Intended to protect bird habitat during nesting season
- Several exceptions for needed mowing

Mowing Law - Exception For visibility and safety concerns



Exception - To establish control of damaging insect populations, noxious weeds, and invasive plant species (wild parsnip, etc.)
(Weed Patch Mowing)




Roadside haying – not a Mowing Law exception
Not allowed until after July 15, and only by permit



Iowa DOT Harvesting and Mowing Permit Application (2008)

- Haying
- Mowing
- Seed Collecting
- Cut flowers
- Berry and fruit harvesting
- Dried plants
- Cattail tubers
- Wood
- Any Plant Material

Form 810050 (04-14)

 **IOWA DOT**
HIGHWAY DIVISION

HARVESTING AND MOWING PERMIT APPLICATION
(Includes harvesting hay or other plant material or mowing within the primary highway right-of-way.)

Applicant Name: _____ Business Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____ City: _____ State: _____ ZIP Code: _____

Daytime Telephone: _____ eMail Address: _____

Locations requesting to mow or harvest within primary highway rights-of-way:

				Owner, renter, or manager of abutting land:	
County: _____	Hwy: _____	Side (N,S,E,W) _____	between mile markers _____ and _____	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
County: _____	Hwy: _____	Side (N,S,E,W) _____	between mile markers _____ and _____	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
County: _____	Hwy: _____	Side (N,S,E,W) _____	between mile markers _____ and _____	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>

For additional locations, attach a separate sheet.

Type of Operation (check all that apply):

☐ Mow only ☐ Harvest hay (☐ large bales; ☐ small bales)

☐ Harvest plant material other than hay (☐ with machinery; ☐ by hand or with hand tools)

☐ seeds; ☐ fruit or berries; ☐ nuts; ☐ fresh plants or flowers; ☐ dried plants;

☐ cattail tubers; ☐ live woody material; ☐ dead woody material (e.g. logs); ☐ other

List species and harvest period:

Agreements:

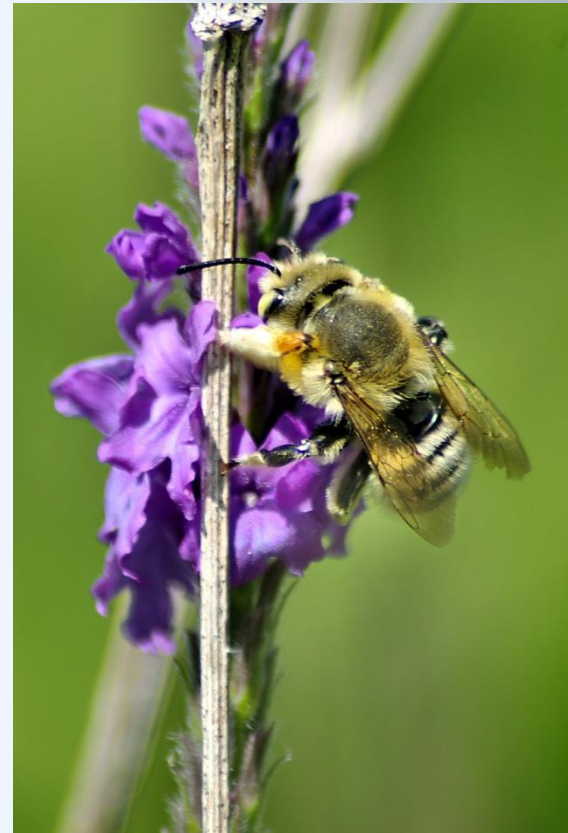
Failure to abide by any stipulation may result in immediate revocation of the permit or denial of future permits. The applicant agrees that if granted a permit to do above described work, the following stipulations shall govern:

1. The department may restrict any operations, including those that affect the health of the vegetation. Mowing of newly seeded areas that are not yet fully established shall not be permitted.
2. Mowing height shall be set so remaining cut stubble height is at least 8 inches.
3. The hay harvest period shall be as specified below. To request other periods, attach a description and purpose.
July 15 – September 1 for cool-season grasses and forage legumes (e.g., brome, tall fescue, alfalfa, birdsfoot trefoil)
July 15 – August 15 for areas containing warm-season native grasses (e.g., big bluestem, indiangrass, little bluestem)
4. For haying, only one cutting per year shall be allowed for any portion of the permitted area.
5. All work on the right-of-way shall be performed between the hours of 30 minutes after sunrise to 30 minutes before sunset.
6. All personnel on foot in the highway right-of-way shall wear ANSI 107 Class 2 safety apparel at all times. Fluorescent yellow-green vests that meet the requirements for normal visibility conditions are available at the local DOT Maintenance Garage (two per applicant).
7. Operations on roads other than interstates shall not be allowed within 15 feet from the edge of the traveled way unless traffic control according to Iowa DOT Standards is provided.

Hungarian Partridge in Grundy Co. IA 175 where farmer obtained hay permit and delayed haying until after July 15



Native bees



DOT native grass and wildflower seeding



53,091 acres Total

- 37,391 acres erosion control
(after new construction)
- 15,700 acres revegetation
(kill out existing brome/fescue and reseed to natives)



Existing vegetation first killed out with glyphosate herbicide, then reseeded.



Mow first 2 years - complaints about weeds
and complaints about mowing wildflowers



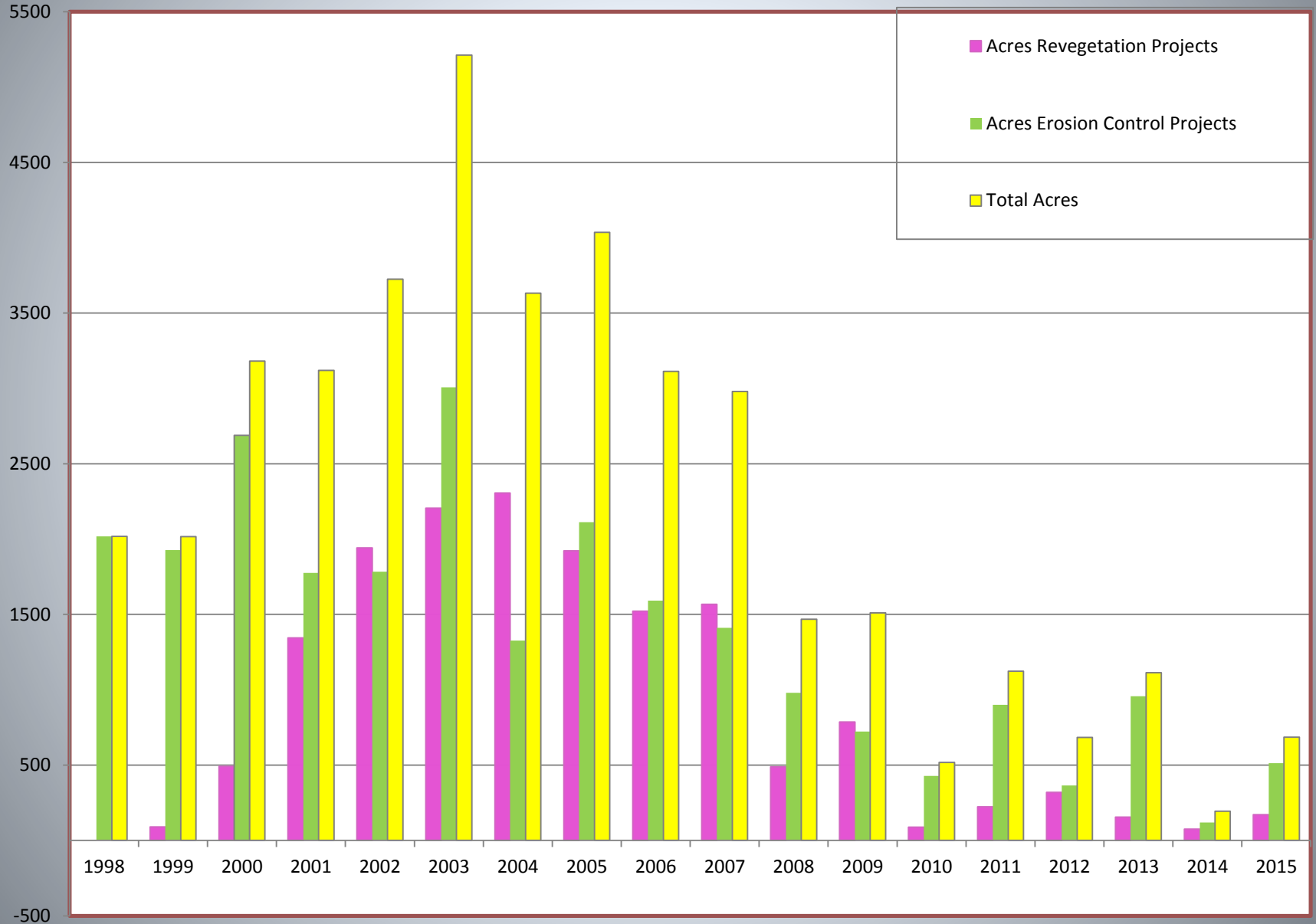


Re-vegetation projects: Controversial



- Cost
- Killing out “perfectly good” vegetation
- Weedy
- Viewed as taking roadsides out of hay production

Acres Native Grass and Wildflower Seeding

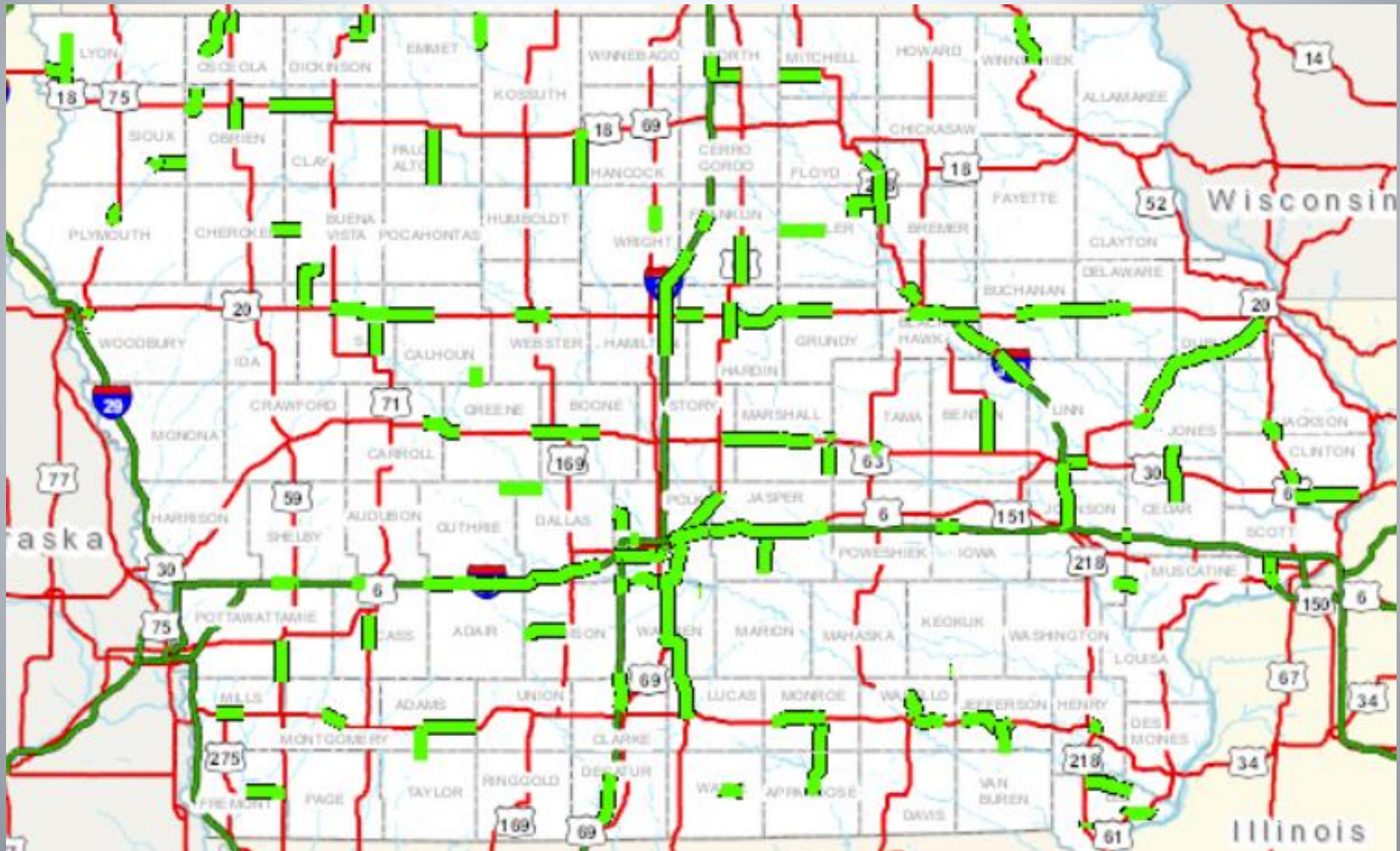


DOT native grass and wildflower seed purchases

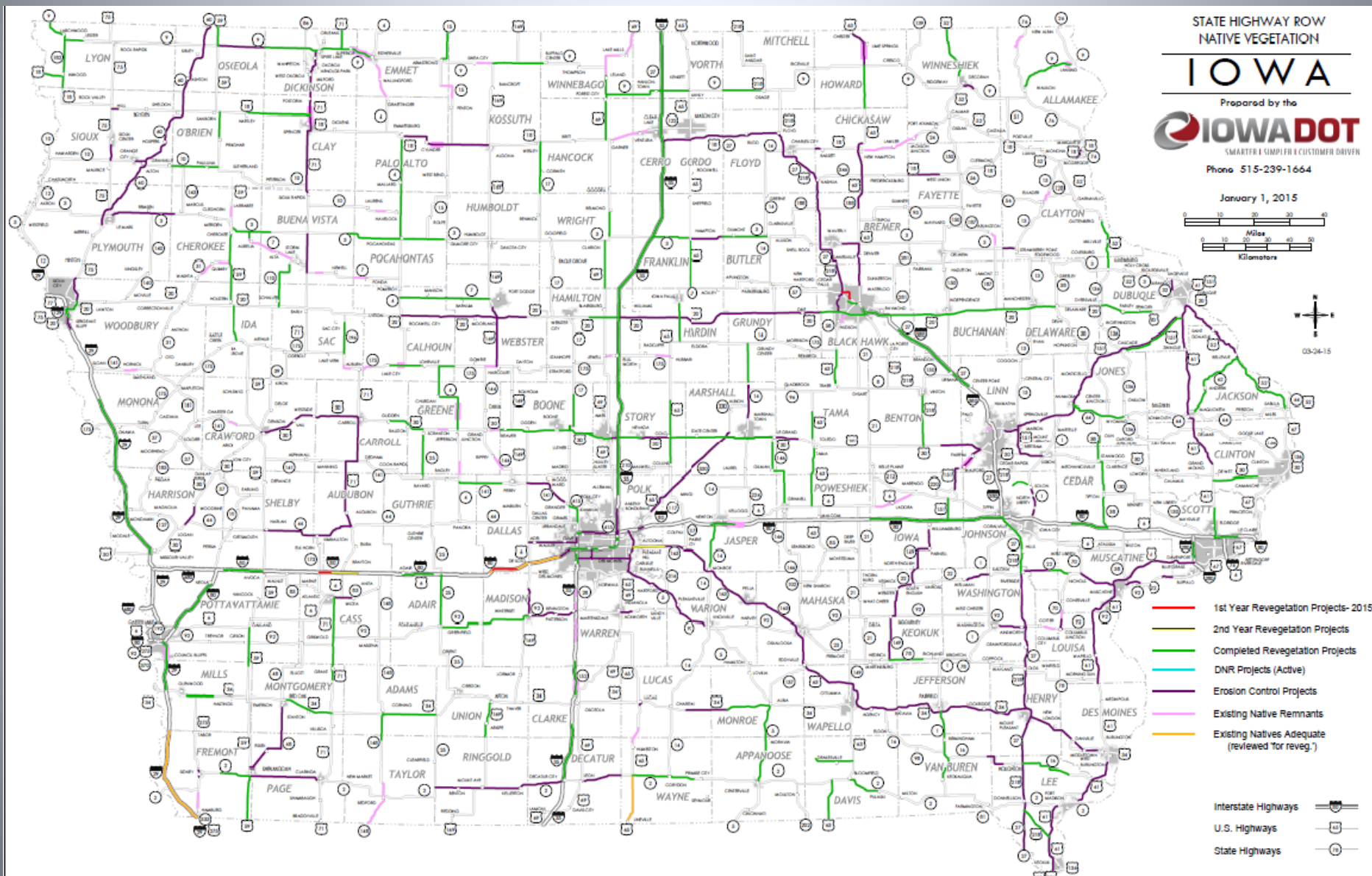
- Supported development of the native seed industry in Iowa
- Made native forb seed more available
- Decreased prices for native seed
- Provided corridors of habitat for wildlife, most importantly the insects that depend on the native plants, although they have gotten the hype until public interest in pollinators.



Landscaping Projects recently in GIS database (revegetation and tree and shrub plantings)



DOT roadsides with native vegetation



Roadside Prairie Remnant, U.S. 30 Greene Co. East of Grand Junction



Long term strategy: establish healthy, adapted vegetation, diverse vegetation that is appropriate for the site and good habitat



Workforce Changes

2005 to 2015

- 26% drop in number of Maintenance employees available for summer work
 - 2005 – 982 Equipment Operators
 - 2015 – 724 Highway Tech Associates
- 120 Maintenance employees (Highway Technicians) fill in as construction inspectors during the off-winter season
- Many districts are contracting spraying



Advice from “oh it could have been so much better if only if...”

- Don't neglect the remnant vegetation in zeal to do restoration plantings! Just back off on mowing.!
- Funding source is key, but grant-based through DOT has its drawbacks.
- Hire the right people, empower them and treat them as professionals.
- Involve all from beginning, including conservationists and adjacent landowners.
- Start slow - iron out contract specifications and seed specs. show success before going big.
- Decide on seed specs and work with seed industry.
- Ensure consistency in changing administration and politics.
- Communicate with staff!

Statewide Contact

joy.williams@dot.iowa.gov

515-233-7729

- To find out who to contact in DOT
- To relay complaints or concerns
- So there is a statewide record of complaints
- To get a hold of someone who cares about native grasses and wildflowers and the value of roadsides as habitat.

