



## BONNER COUNTY PUBLIC WORKS

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July 18, 2013

To: Commissioners

From: Gordon Bates, P.E., Director Road and Bridge

Cc: Leslie Marshall, Director Public Works

Re: Roadside Vegetation Policy & Procedure

Public Works (Weed Department) has historically combined efforts with the Road and Bridge Department in an attempt to control both noxious weeds and other brushy vegetation along County maintained roadways. Despite our combined best efforts small trees have grown into large trees creating roadside obstacles within Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) recommended roadside safety corridors.

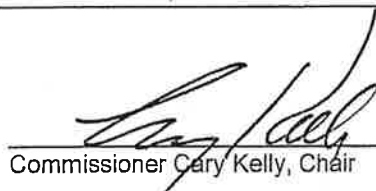
FHWA guideline *Vegetation Control for Safety* recommends numerous maintenance practices to enhance public safety. It states "...Trees too close to the road can present a fixed object hazard. Grass, weeds, brush and tree limbs can obscure or limit a driver's view of traffic control devices, approaching vehicles, wildlife and livestock, and pedestrians and bicycles. Controlling vegetation helps reduce crashes and injuries..."

An operational zone of 10-ft to 12-ft wide is recommended. This zone should be hazard free to allow for vehicle recovery without serious damage or injury. Driver sight distance is also provided for to give drivers the chance to stop before striking persons or wildlife.

A workshop was held on May 30, 2013, to provide the public with an opportunity to provide comment and input. In response to public comments the policy was revised to add common sense applications to tree removal. In summary, it my recommendation that the Board of County Commissioners ratify the attached Public Works Department Vegetation Control policies and procedures for County maintained roadways.

**A suggested motion would be: I move to ratify the Bonner County Roadside Vegetation Control Policy and Procedure. Annual maintenance shall be prioritized and scheduled by Public Works and be conducted within fiscal year budget allocations. It is acknowledged by the Board of Bonner County Commissioners that not all recommended vegetation control work can be completed annually due to limited County budget allocations.**

Recommendation Acceptance: ☒ yes ☐ no

  
Commissioner Cary Kelly, Chair

date: 7-23-13

# **BONNER COUNTY PUBLIC WORKS ROADSIDE VEGETATION CONTROL POLICY AND PROCEDURE**

This policy and procedure has been developed to incorporate the maintenance guidelines set forth in the Federal Highways Department pamphlet titled *Vegetation Control for Safety*, revised August 2008. Roadside safety guidelines cannot be implemented on all Bonner County maintained roadways due to physical and topographic constraints, limited public rights-of-way, and limited budget allocations as set by the Bonner County Board of County Commissioners.

Roadside vegetation control shall be limited to those public roads that are in the County maintenance system, as approved by the Bonner County Board of Commissioners. Work should be limited to rights-of-way owned by Bonner County, dedicated public rights-of-way and prescriptive easements for public rights-of-way (as defined by Idaho law).

## **Operational Zone**

It is the intention of Bonner County to maintain an Operational Zone about 10-ft to 12-ft wide beyond the edge of road shoulder for the enhancement of public safety. Width may be wider to match dedicated public rights-of-way. Width may be narrower where limited by rights-of-way and other physical constraints.

Primary Goals of vegetation control are to provide the following:

1. Improved visibility of signs, pedestrians, livestock and wildlife that may be along the roadside.
2. Improved visibility of oncoming vehicles near intersections, driveways and around curves.
3. Reduce the number of trees near the roadway that could result in a severe accident if struck by a vehicle.
4. Provide an area for drivers to safely recover or stop in the event that a vehicle departs the travel lane.

This zone should be clear of trees with a diameter larger than 4-inches and brush taller than 3-feet. Tree limbs should be trimmed to a height of approximately 9-ft above the road shoulder and should not extend over the road travel lanes. Grasses are allowed and should be encouraged in order to choke out brush and provide erosion control.

"Common Sense" Exceptions: The Public Works Director, or designated representative, should consider unique physical roadside circumstances to determine if tree removal from the Operational Zone may increase accident severity. Such determinations should be documented via memo and photographs. Said determination

shall be retained in the file for that specific roadway. Examples of unique circumstances are listed but not limited to the following:

1. Trees should be retained where said trees provide the only barrier to help prevent vehicles from plunging into water bodies of sufficient depth to partially or fully submerge a vehicle.
2. Trees should be retained where said trees provide the only barrier to help prevent vehicles from plunging more than 15-feet down an embankment with a slope steeper than 2-ft horizontal to 1-ft vertical.
3. Trees on hillsides above the roadway may be left in place where steep slopes would most likely prevent vehicles from impacting said trees.
4. Trees should be retained where the removal may adversely affect embankment slope stability. Leaning or large trees may be removed from embankments to prevent slope failure should the naturally falling tree tear out its root wad. In the event that trees are cut from slopes, the root wad should remain to provide erosion control. Stumps should be cut as near to ground level as reasonably possible.
5. In all cases, trees within the Operational Zone may be removed where it is determined that other trees either within or beyond the Operational Zone are reasonably expected to provide an adequate barrier.

#### **Notice of Tree Trimming and Removal**

- A. When tree trimming and/or removal work is scheduled, the Public Works Director shall cause the edge of rights-of-way or limits of clearing to be marked by lathes with brightly colored ribbon on each affected road, so as to reasonably give notice to the road user and property owners. Lathes with ribbon should be placed once every several hundred feet or at parcel boundaries in a manner sufficiently close together to visually designate the limitations for vegetation control.
- B. Trees located within the designated limits of clearing should be removed to enhance public safety. Trees with a 12-inch or larger diameter should be marked by a large white painted "X" facing the roadway, so as to reasonably give notice to the road user and property owners of pending tree removal.
- C. When possible, prior to commencing tree trimming and removal work, Public Works should place two or three large signs along the roadway noting pending vegetation removal. The signs, lathes with ribbons and tree markings should be posted for approximately seven (7) calendar days before starting work. These postings shall serve as notice that vegetation control work is pending on a County maintained roadway.  
Leaning or dangerous trees may be removed without prior notifications.
- D. Trees removed from rights-of-way owned by Bonner County are the property of Bonner County. Public Works has the discretion, but not obligation, to either sell marketable timber, dispose of waste trees at an approved location or give trees to adjacent landowners (if requested in writing). Landowners will be responsible for all limbs and debris from trees left on their property.

E. Trees cut down within prescriptive easements for public rights-of-way (as defined by Idaho law) are the property of the landowner. Public Works staff should make a reasonable effort to receive landowner's written instruction to:

- 1) leave fallen trees on the parcel and outside of the Operational Zone, or
- 2) have Public Works haul away the trees including limbs.

Reasonable effort to contact excludes mass mailing to landowners. Landowners will be responsible for all limbs and debris from trees left on their property. When the landowner provides written permission to Public Works to haul marketable timber the proceeds go to the County. If the landowner cannot be contacted by reasonable means then trees and limbs should be hauled away to reduce fire hazard.

### **Application of Herbicides**

Control of brushy vegetation along with noxious weeds by the application of herbicides is the most cost effective maintenance strategy for County maintained roadways. Application is typically conducted in one of the three maintenance districts annually creating an once every three year application cycle. Spray should be limited to within 10-feet of the road shoulder and conducted in a manner to minimize spray drift as much as possible. All manufacture instructions and regulatory guidelines should be followed. The attached guideline for public notice should be implemented annually.

### **Roadside Mowing**

Grass and brush height may be controlled by the use of power mowing equipment on County maintained roadways. Mowing is typically conducted annually by Public Works staff. The effective width of the mower may be 2-feet to 6-feet wide from the shoulder of road depending on terrain. Public notification of pending mowing operations is NOT warranted.