

## **Benton County Integrated Roadside Vegetation Management Advisory Committee**

Fourth Annual Report, 2013

Prepared on January 24, 2014

Integrated Roadside Vegetation Management (IRVM) began in Benton County when the Board of Supervisors adopted an IRVM management plan on August 9, 2005. This action supported the use of native perennial vegetation to reduce roadside management costs and solve environmental issues such as soil erosion and stormwater management. The Benton County Integrated Roadside Vegetation Management Advisory Committee was formed on December 1<sup>st</sup> 2009. This committee was created to assist in the planning and implementation of Benton County's roadside management efforts.

Integrated Roadside Vegetation Management provides numerous benefits to Benton County and its residents. By focusing on restoring diverse communities of prairie plants, our planted roadside areas contain durable, long-lived stands of vegetation that effectively combat noxious weed infestations. This occurs in several ways. Tall prairie vegetation shades out Canada Thistle and other weed seedlings that are difficult to control. Prairie root systems also deprive weed roots of water, nutrients and space that they need to survive. Furthermore, diverse prairie communities reduce the effects of erosion and stormwater runoff. Prairie root systems often penetrate 6-8 ft. but can extend deeper. This enables the plants to survive drought and high salt concentrations. In addition, deep root systems and dense above ground vegetation holds soil together and reduces stormwater runoff by slowing surface water flow and increasing infiltration. With 98% of Iowa being cultivated roadsides also provide one of the last places to preserve our natural heritage. By planting native vegetation we ensure that these communities will survive into the future.

The current 10 member IRVM board is composed of 5 public members and 5 government members. The members include: Ann Jorgensen, James Huber, Randy Scheel, Matt Purdy, Ben Bonar, Joan Lundberg, Calvin Wolter, Carol Zander, Barb Higdon and Harold Cassens. The committee met four times during the past year.

The Benton County IRVM Advisory Committee had a productive year that resulted in a variety of accomplishments. These accomplishments are listed below.

### **1. Prairie Restoration in County ROW:**

Myron Parizek applied for native prairie seed through the Living Roadway Trust Fund (LRTF). This successful request provided enough seed to plant 50 acres of right of way (ROW). Information pertaining to this year's plantings can be found below.

- 50% of calendar year 2013 native seed was used to plant ROW

- 50% of calendar year 2013 native seed will be carried over into 2014
- ~34.25 acres of native vegetation were restored in Benton County ROW (This number includes acres planted with leftover seed from 2012)
- 11.65 acres were planted with a seed drill (~34%)
- 9.502 acres were planted with a hydroseeder (~28%)
- 13.098 acres were planted with a broadcast seeder (~38%)
- 284.25 acres of native vegetation have been planted since 2005
- There are ~5184 acres of ROW in Benton County
- ~5.5% of Benton County ROW has been planted to native vegetation

2. **Benton County IRVM Roadside Manager Hiring:**

The Benton County Secondary Roads Department hired Ben Bonar to fill the Benton County IRVM Roadside Manager position in November of 2013. Ben completed his education at the University of Northern Iowa where he attained his Bachelors in Ecology and Masters in Ecosystem Management. Before starting with Benton County, Ben worked for a variety of natural resource organizations. These include the Iowa DNR Parks Department, Black Hawk County Conservation and Iowa DNR Prairie Resource Center. We are excited to have Ben on board and work together toward improving IRVM in Benton County. A list of his accomplishments can be found below.

- Passed Core, 1A and 6 Pesticide Applicators tests and will receive license soon
- Prepared and submitted a grant through the Iowa Native Plant Society to fund a rain garden in front the of Secondary Roads Department office.
- Designed interpretive signage for rain garden project
- Overhauled the Benton County IRVM Management Plan to meet new guidelines
- Attended ArcGIS 10.1 training through Schneider Corporation in Ankeny
- Purchased a laptop computer with previously awarded LRTF funds
- Began evaluating identified prairie remnants in Benton County
- Attended Mowing Law Working Group meeting on January 20<sup>th</sup>
- Created an Benton County IRVM Facebook page
- Attending RT-130 Prescribed Fire Refresher in February
- Attending Weed Commissioners meeting in March
- Will be submitting LRTF grants when funding guidelines get finalized

3. **Noxious Weed and Roadside Spraying Report:**

Reducing herbicide use is a goal of the Benton County IRVM program. By restoring native vegetation we can drastically reduce the amount of money spent on labor and

inputs. As a program we are also seeking to use the most effective herbicide/method for the species that we treat and will continue to evaluate new products to become more environmentally friendly and efficient. Below is a summary of herbicide usage in ROW for Benton County in 2013.

- \$77,335.20 was spent on herbicide to manage ROW in 2013
- ~ 50% of this herbicide was used to manage ROW in 2013
- Canada Thistle, Musk Thistle, Wild Carrot and Multiflora Rose were the most problematic noxious weeds in 2013
- Wild Parsnip and Common Mullein were the most problematic invasive weeds in 2013

4. **Goals and Objectives for 2014:**

The Benton County IRVM Advisory Committee has set several goals for the coming year. These goals include:

- Prioritizing the funding needs of the IRVM program and then submitting LRTF grant applications to help fund equipment and activities
- Increase public awareness through public presentations and workshops. A minimum of 2 workshops and 3 presentations will be completed throughout 2014. Ideas for programs and workshops are listed below
  - Seed harvest event
  - Prairie walk
  - What is IRVM
- Evaluate prairie remnants in Benton County ROW and determine what management practices need to take place to revitalize these areas
- Develop a website presence
- Use leftover seed from 2013 to plant the west side of Benton Linn Road
- Establish a partnership with the Iowa DNR Prairie Resource Center
- Complete the rain garden project at the Benton County Secondary Roads Office
- Begin seed predation experiment with the UNI Tallgrass Prairie Center
- Collect GPS data for roadside plantings and create a GIS database to store and manage this information
- Inventory pioneer cemeteries for remnant prairie populations