

Where can I get more information?

For Roadsides for Wildlife information, plans, presentations, training, and legal mandates
Carmelita.Nelson@dnr.state.mn.us
651-259-5014

For cost-share projects, prairie planting, prescribed burn, and equipment coordination
Pete.Schaefer@dnr.state.mn.us
507-225-3572

For brochures, free roadside signs, annual youth poster contest, and nest box info
Larinda.Burg@dnr.state.mn.us
507-359-6035

For Living Snow Fence assistance
Daniel.Gullickson@dot.state.mn.us
651-366-3610

ROADSIDES FOR WILDLIFE



Roadsides For Wildlife

Minnesota has over 135,000 miles of roads. The adjacent linear lands are important for they can provide permanent



Photo: MNDNR

grassland habitat for birds, small animals, and other types of nature, including butterflies, frogs, and flowers.

Though narrow, these ribbons of land are long on potential because of their total acreage. The Minnesota Department of Transportation, for example, has 176,000 acres of roadside along its 11,900 miles of roadway. Townships maintain 58,000 miles of roadway; counties 45,500 miles. There is more potential habitat parallel to city, park, and forest roads. The roadsides that are most important are those in landscapes where there is little grassland habitat.

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What Kinds of Wildlife Use Roadsides?

More than 40 bird species use roadsides for nesting. Another 60-plus species of birds use roadsides for food and cover. Many small mammals use roadsides during part of their life cycle. Converting roadside vegetation from alfalfa-clover to native prairie reduces deer grazing in roadsides. Butterflies, bees and many other beneficial insects use wildflowers growing in roadsides.



Photo: MNDNR

A pheasant nest.





Photo: MNDNR

What Are the Benefits of Planting Prairie Grasses and Wildflowers?

Prairies are sometimes called upside-down forests because much of the plant and animal life is below ground. Many prairie plants have roots 5 to 15 feet deep. Deep roots improve water quality by increasing absorption and reducing runoff. They decrease erosion by anchoring soil. They require minimal maintenance. Prairie plants also sequester carbon, reduce the potential for invasive species, and may have the potential for managed biofuel harvest.

What Makes Good Roadside Habitat?

High-quality roadside habitat is composed of a variety of native grasses and wildflowers of varying heights. Together, these plants provide natural cover and food. The grassland bird-nesting season is from April to early August. Therefore, roadside vegetation that is left undisturbed during this time—meaning no mowing or vehicle traffic—is more beneficial to wildlife.



Photo: MNDNR

What Can I Do to Improve Roadside Habitat?



Photo: MNDNR

• Delay mowing or haying until August 1

This will prevent mowing equipment from harming egg-filled nests, hens, and chicks. The first 8 feet of the shoulder can be mowed regularly for safety.

• Reduce disturbance

Roadsides that have not been mowed for three years have up to three times as many nests per acre as those mowed annually. Mowing every three years is sufficient to control brush. Mow grass high to leave cover over winter. Vehicles disturb nesting birds.

• Spot mow and spot spray

This type of weed control is less likely to harm native plants and wildlife. Avoid pesticides with petroleum-based carriers. These may stick to an egg, reducing air transfer through the shell membrane and killing the embryo.

• Add habitat

Establish native prairie, a living snow fence, or rain gardens on adjacent property. Use local ecotype native prairie seed. Install and maintain well-placed nest boxes.

• Be a partner

Many conservation groups have interest in roadside habitat conservation. Contact Pheasants Forever, Bluebird Recovery Program, Audubon Society, or similar organizations for more information.

• Seek funding

Habitat cost-sharing money is available. Have your local road authority contact DNR Wildlife for prairie seed or more information.

• Show your support

Post a DNR Roadside for Wildlife sign at the edge of the right-of-way. Signs are free.