

NCHRP 20-68 – “US Domestic Scan Program”

Domestic Scan 24-01 “Leading Practices for Cost-Effective Vegetation Management within Highway Rights of Way.”

Departments of Transportation (DOTs) face many challenges in dealing with maintenance and operational needs as well as an ever-increasing array of emergency responses to situations within their rights of way. Extreme heat and cold temperatures for prolonged periods of time, an increased number and strength of severe weather events, fires, collateral damage from vehicle accidents, and earthquakes provide many challenges to owners regarding both man made and natural elements of their facility. Successful strategies that address issues involving roadside vegetation are of great interest to owners as there are many challenges and there is no one size fits all solution. Successful vegetation management requires expertise, insight, coordination, tools, and strategy.

This scan will examine various aspects of vegetation management strategies ranging from supporting native seed markets, targeted and integrated roadside vegetation management programs (IRVM), training, planning and site management. The team will examine native seed development, subject matter experts thoughts on better planning of native seed or plant needs and vegetation management strategies, agency funding and contracting policies, regional seed production and coordination of enterprises (suppliers). The scan team will also seek to identify what owners identify as "native" and "locally" native vegetation to try to develop a clear definition for consideration by the industry.

Potential agencies and programs that might be considered include as the University of Northern Iowa Tallgrass Prairie Center and Iowa DOT Partnership in Ames and Cedar Falls, IA, the Texas Native Seed Program in Kingsville, Texas, the Tribal Alliance for Pollinators in Bixby, OK. Other regional programs that could be considered include The Northeast Seed and Plant Supply Chain Network; The Willamette Valley Native Plant Partnership; The North Coast Native Plant Partnership; Florida Department of Transportation/Wildflower Program; and The Southwest Seed Partnership. The scan might also speak with agencies such as the Greenbelt Native Plant Center and Mid-Atlantic Regional Seed Bank, BLM Seeds of Success, Nevada Seed Strategy, and California Seed Strategy.

This scan is being planned as a Virtual Peer Exchange (Type 4). This scan will develop key recommendations, tools and technology, training and practices for DOTs striving to improve and be more cost-effective with their vegetation management strategies, native seed supply, planning, staff roles and responsibilities, agreements, approaches to contracting, etc. The scan will identify possible actions for establishing statewide, regional, local and cooperative enterprises for vegetation management including native seed development, diversity, supply, and usage. Case studies demonstrating successful practices and programs should be captured for dissemination to others as part of the teams' deliverables. The information gained will be useful and shared with DOT managers, landscape architects, contractors, contracting officers, construction managers, environmental specialists, and DOT stakeholders, including plant material and seed suppliers, and resource agencies. Information will also be shared at AASHTO and TRB committee meetings, on webinars, various other national conferences and with Federal and non-Federal members of the Plant Conservation Alliance.

Original Scan Proposal Title: 24-03: Leading Practices for Native Plant Establishment and Cost-Effective Vegetation Management along Roadsides.