

## ABSTRACT

### A STRATEGY TO ENCOURAGE NATIVE WILDFLOWERS WITHIN HIGHWAY RIGHTS-OF-WAY IN SOUTHERN ONTARIO

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The practice of establishing native wildflowers in highway rights-of-way as a less expensive and more environmentally compatible alternative to traditional plantings of foreign, less ecologically compatible plant materials has recently become widespread in the United States.

Initial efforts to seek more economical roadside vegetation establishment and management alternatives arose from the increased cost of fuel during the energy crisis of the 1970s. Surprisingly, a reduced standard of maintenance went unchallenged as the public enjoyed the colourful wildflowers that appeared, environmentalists appreciated the reduction in the use of herbicides and of fossil fuel and highway managers realized cost savings. In addition

wildlife flourished and tourism increased. In 1987, conscious of these benefits, federal legislators in the United States mandated the use of native wildflowers nationwide.

Ontario, too, has had to face the reality of cutbacks in its highway maintenance budget and has investigated alternative roadside vegetation strategies: natural regeneration has been allowed to occur on a limited basis, mowing and herbicide use have been reduced generally, two studies to determine the feasibility of establishing wildflowers in highway rights-of-way have recently been completed, and a study to review current roadside vegetation practices has just been tendered.

Researchers for the two feasibility studies have concluded that wildflowers could be established in highway rights-of-way in Ontario and that native species are preferred for ecological and social reasons. Following a review of the experience of Department of Transportation researchers in the United States, principally in the Great Lakes region, and practitioners of natural vegetation establishment in Ontario, the considerations necessary for the implementation of a programme to establish native wildflowers in highway rights-of-way in southern Ontario are presented.