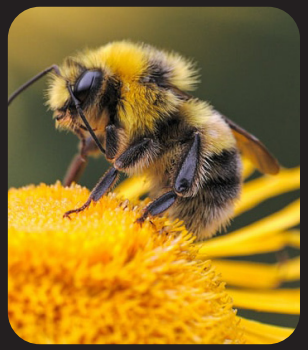
Kentucky's Buzzing! — Vegetation Management to Transform Kentucky's Roadside Landscapes

What's Happening on Kentucky's Roadsides?



Drivers are used to seeing neatly trimmed grass extending from the roadway edge to the border of state-maintained property. Beginning this year motorists will encounter a new look on rural interstates, parkways, and some other routes. Mowing will be done less often and focus on a 15-foot strip adjacent to the shoulder. Less frequent mowing will encourage the growth of pollinator habitat and foster the growth of native plants, including colorful wildflowers. Although the vegetation will be a little taller in some areas, this will not impact driver visibility or safety.

How Long Will It Take to See Results?

Based on the experiences of other state departments of transportation that have introduced programs to expand pollinator habitat, wildflowers and native vegetation will not return immediately. It is a gradual process and will require adjusting management strategies over multiple growing seasons. During this period, KYTC's will focus on promoting native vegetation and suppressing invasive species. The transformation of Kentucky's roadsides will progressively unfold over the next 5 to 10 years.

KYTC's Efforts to Expand Pollinator Habitat

In addition to mowing less, the Cabinet is rapidly increasing the number of pollinator habitats it maintains around the state. Fifty-five new pollinator plots will be completed by fall of 2021, bringing the number KYTC-managed plots to 125. The new plots will add 135 acres of pollinator habitat and increase the total number of pollinator habitat acres overseen by the Cabinet to 230. Over the next few years, KYTC aims to grow total pollinator habitat acreage by 50% each year.

What Are Pollinators and Why Are They Important?

Most plants could not reproduce without the help of pollinators. Pollinators move pollen from one flower to another, which results in the production of seeds and fruit. Pollinators help pollinate at least 180,000 plant species and over 1,200 crops — including many of the crops we rely on for food. While estimates vary, the market value of crops pollinated by insects is around $30 billion each year. A commonly cited statistic is that in 3 bites of food we take is directly attributable to pollinators! Key pollinators include bees, butterflies, moths, bats, birds, ants, flies, and beetles.

Are There Other Benefits?

Increasing plant diversity in roadside landscapes creates a more varied appearance, which can improve driver safety. Studies have found roadsides with colorful wildflowers and vegetation growing to different heights increases driver alertness and may reduce crashes. Also, less mowing can reduce deer-vehicle collisions by lessening the abundance of freshly cut grass — a food source which deer prefer.

KENTUCKY TRANSPORTATION CABINET

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