

INSIDE GRUNDY COUNTY
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Before mowing road ditches, consider the following points. What if you didn't mow your road ditches this year? Or what if you decided to wait until at least August 1? What would be the benefit? The biggest benefit would be to wildlife that make their home in roadside habitat. Ditches provide nesting and habitat for a variety of wildlife including pheasants. Not mowing before August 1 will allow the crucial nesting and brood rearing time to pass. Also, not mowing will save fuel, labor and equipment costs. Safety is another factor to consider when deciding to mow a road ditch. There is a greater risk of tractor rollovers with roadside mowing, particularly if the equipment is not designed for that use. There are times when mowing the road shoulder or some intersections may be necessary to improve the safety of the driving public.

You might even want to take this a step further and establish native prairie grasses and flowers that will add to the beauty of the landscape. Native grasses and flowers are able to control weeds when they are established, which also limits the need for pesticides to control weeds. Establishing native prairie plants can add beauty and habitat to the landscape. Native grasses and flowers can produce a root system so dense that weeds cannot get established and will do well on rocky sites and areas of poor soils. In areas where problem weeds do exist, spot spraying of those particular weeds are possible. Well managed roadsides could potentially add 500,000 acres of wildlife habitat to the state of Iowa. That would go a long way towards providing habitat for wildlife.

Roadsides provide important nesting, brooding and winter cover for pheasants and a variety of wildlife. Current farming practices result in less land being available to provide cover for pheasants and other ground nesting animals. Research has shown that up to one half of all pheasants produced may come from roadsides. Roadsides are also a favorite for waterfowl nesting. One reason for this is that road ditches provide "edges" which are complex habitats joining two different landscapes which provide excellent habitat for wildlife.

There is not an excess of suitable habitat for wildlife in Grundy County. Establishing native grasses and flowers in road ditches is one way to increase habitat. For more information, contact the Grundy County Office of ISU Extension at 319-824-6979 and ask for the publication: *Managing Iowa Habitats: Restoring Odd Areas in Rural Landscapes*.