

# native wildflowers



ROADSIDE SIGNS OF HOPE




Pale Purple Coneflower, *Echinacea pallida*, Missouri

WILDFLOWERS AND THE FEDERAL-AID HIGHWAY PROGRAM



Blazing Star, *Liatris pycnostachya*  
Oklahoma



“A species must  
be saved in many  
different places if  
it is to be saved  
at all.”

Aldo Leopold, Sand County Almanac,  
1949.

Roadsides are one of those places. While our natural heritage is under pressure from invasive plants and diseases, development, agriculture, mining, and more, the nation has an opportunity to protect the pieces and restore the rest. This opportunity is recognized by the Federal-Aid Highway Program along with State highway and other land-managing agencies. Protecting the natural heritage that exists on some roadsides from invasives as well as restoring native diversity to highly disturbed projects, serves as one of those “many different places” where species can be saved.

Native plants along our nation’s roadsides do more than provide visual beauty. They also create a sense of place, provide habitat for wildlife, stabilize highway slopes, and act as a buffer to precious natural areas. Highways give us access to the diversity of nature, seasonal color changes, the richness of our culture, the gracefulness of the landscape, the draw of the horizon, geological surprises, many water wonders, regional character, a window to the past, and a glimpse of the future. Views from the highway also reveal so much about us all.

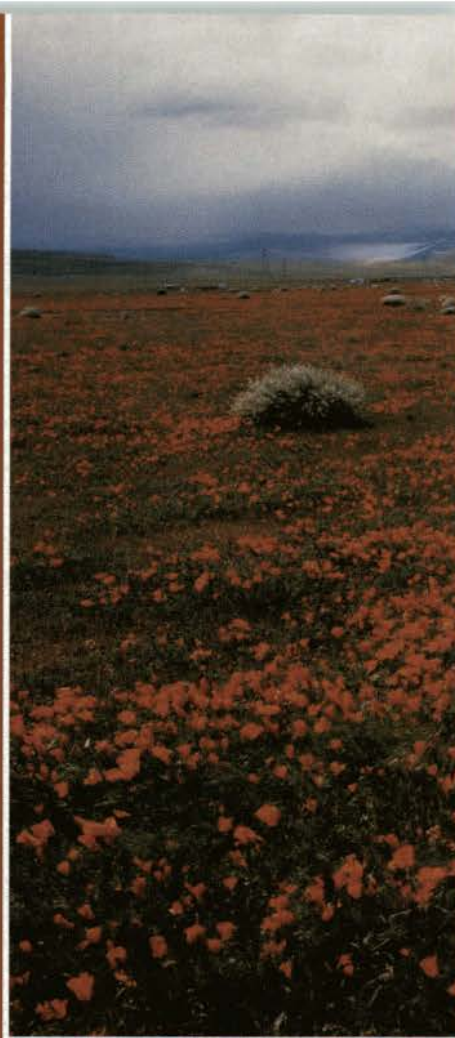
## OPERATION WILDFLOWER

Native Wildflowers (forbs and grasses) and other native plants provide visual beauty, a sense of place that enhances the natural scenic beauty of our Nation's landscape. The growing concern for our natural heritage has generated an increasing interest in their preservation and restoration.

Our Nation's highways provide access to the splendors of nature as well as offer opportunities for natural beauty within their rights-of-way. Under the program provisions of "Operation Wildflower" and the Surface Transportation and Uniform Relocation Assistance Act (STURAA) of 1987, native wildflowers are being planted in the rights-of-way to add natural character to the highway environment. These programs are the framework of the highway wildflower planting program (23 CFR 752).

The "Operation Wildflower" program, initiated in December 1973, is a volunteer cooperative program between the National Council of State Garden Clubs, Inc., the State highway agencies, and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA).

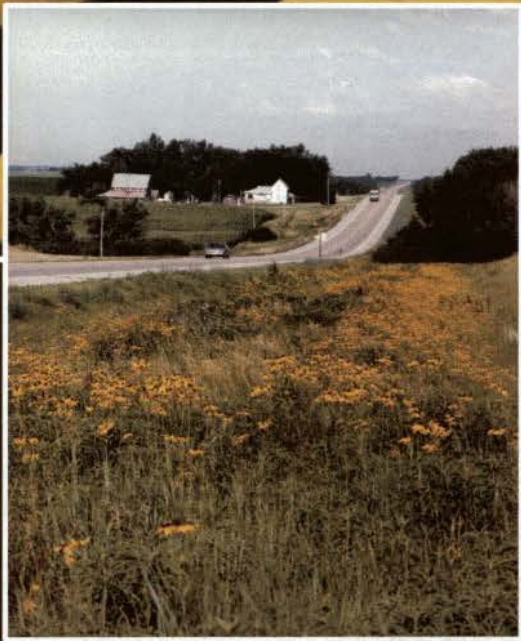
Under this program, a State Garden Club, or a member club of a State Federation, may pay for or furnish native wildflower seeds or seedlings to a State highway agency for planting within the highway corridor. The State highway agency has the responsibility for making final determination on the appropriate location for, and the installation and maintenance of the wildflowers. In this instance, the agency provides land, labor, and expertise for the planting and management of the wildflowers. Federal-aid highway funds are available for participation in the cost of planting the wildflowers.





California Poppy, *Eschscholzia californica*  
Antelope Valley Botanical Management Area  
State Route 138  
Los Angeles, California





Grayhead Prairie Coneflower, *Raibida pinnata*  
Highway 2  
Otoe County,  
Nebraska



## STURAA

The Surface Transportation and Uniform Relocation Assistance Act became effective on April 1987. It contains a mandatory requirement that native wildflower seeds or seedlings or both be planted as part of landscaping projects undertaken on the Federal-aid highway system. At least one-quarter of one percent of the funds expended for a landscaping project must be used to plant native wildflowers on that project. A landscaping project involves any action taken as part of a highway construction project or as a separate action to enhance the aesthetics of a highway through the placement of plant material consistent with a landscape design plan.

Waivers are given rarely. If native wildflowers are inappropriate on a project, i.e. urban formal landscapes adjoin, the cost of these wildflowers should be banked for a future project. Such agreements have been formalized between the Federal Highway Administration and the States of Wisconsin and California.

Native wildflower seeds or seedlings donated by civic organizations or other organizations and individuals can be included as part of landscaping projects undertaken under STURAA. The value of donated plant material, however, may not be counted toward the required minimum expenditure.

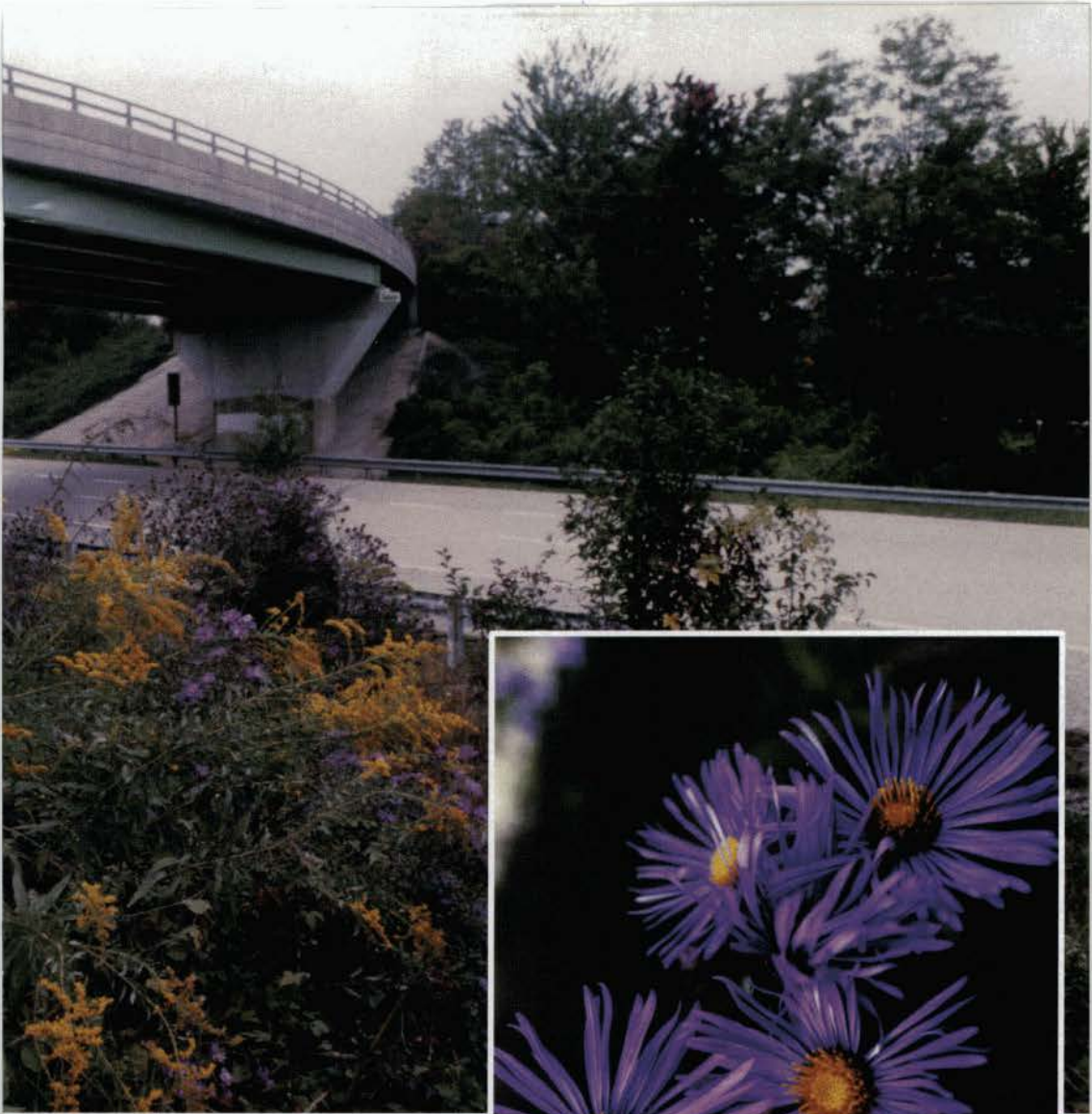


## OTHER PROGRAM EFFORTS

Native wildflowers are being grown along the highway rights-of-way under other program initiatives instituted by the States. Such programs include: Roadsides for Wildlife, Wildflower Routes, Botanical areas, wetland creation, revegetation following invasive plant control. Additionally, native forbs and grasses are being customarily included in plantings undertaken as part of routine erosion control measures. They are also being planted as continuing efforts to beautify highways through "Adopt-A-Highway" and "Adopt-A-Spot". Six central States have combined efforts to restore and protect native wildflowers through the Prairie Passage project. This kind of creativity in conservation is encouraged as our natural heritage diminishes and wildlife habitats decline.

Native





New England Aster, *Aster novae-angliae*  
I-195 corridor in Anne Arundel County,  
Maryland

Wildflowers



Dotted Mint, *Monarda punctata*  
Central Wisconsin I-94 corridor

Native W



### **THINGS YOU CAN DO:**

- Protect native plants now
- Never plant invasive nonnative wildflowers.
- Purchase native forbs and grasses from ethical sources.
- Salvage native plants before development when possible.
- Avoid digging wildflowers in the wild.
- Enjoy wildflowers, leave them for others to enjoy.
- Plant an outdoor classroom for school children.
- Join a Native Plant Society in your State.

# “Where wildflowers bloom, so does hope.”

Mrs. Johnson, *Wildflowers Across America*, 1993

## A Special Thanks to Mrs. Johnson

In 1987 Lady Bird Johnson influenced the transportation reauthorization bill, creating the native wildflower requirement. Because of her continued support, State departments of transportation are not only planting more native flowers and grasses, but are also protecting more existing native plants. Her impassioned call for protection of our natural heritage inspires us all. Roadside conservation efforts will continue into the future because of her.

For more information: [www.fhwa.dot.gov/roadsides](http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/roadsides)  
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