

Activities of the Landscape Department of the State Highway Commission of Indiana

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During the past year, our Landscape Department has returned to something near its prewar level of accomplishments. We now have landscape maintenance crews in each of the six districts. Even though we lack much in equipment and transportation, we are hoping that some Act of Providence may provide us some of the tools we need and thus permit us to complete more of the backlog of our maintenance work and better prepare us for emergencies as well as new roadside improvements.

Two roadside planting projects were planned and completed during the past year. The first, at Fort Wayne on the dual-lane U. S. 24 extending approximately 5.4 miles southwest of the city, was made with redbud, dogwood, and shadbush furnished by the Fort Wayne Garden Clubs and planted by our forces. A part of this project was planted last spring and an additional planting was made this past fall.

The second roadside planting was made at Evansville this past fall on U. S. 41 and extended for approximately three miles north of the city. In addition to dogwood and redbud, this planting also included a number of ginkgo trees. Plant material for this project was purchased with state highway funds and planting was done by maintenance forces. Several other roadside plantings were discussed with various civic-minded groups who desired to participate in such a program in their localities, but, to date, none have reached the designing stage.

CHEMICAL SPRAYS

We are aware that there has been a tremendous development during these postwar years in chemical weed killers. And, as the general public becomes educated to their values, we are certain their use

will be demanded. We know that there will be ever-increasing numbers of letters of complaint from farmers, farm organizations, hay fever sufferers, garden clubs, and many others. As a means for increasing their own knowledge of these chemicals and their possibilities, we conducted tests on two plots of right of way. One was on U. S. 40 at Dublin in the Greenfield District; the other on S. R. 34 near New Ross in the Crawfordsville District. All manufacturers were invited to participate in these demonstrations. The Dow Chemical Company furnished all types of 2, 4-D preparations, with and without ester bases, and also a contact herbicide. We were also contacted at one of our monthly meetings by a representative of the Sherwin Williams Company, who conducted a demonstration on a small plot of right of way on S. R. 39 near Delphi. Samples of 2, 4-D preparations were also received from several other manufacturers and were tested by our own department. All district landscape supervisors have secured small hand sprayers for use during the past year in conducting their own experiments and for handling as many complaints from farmers about patches of obnoxious weeds on the right-of-way as their limited equipment permitted.

The Crawfordsville District, during the past year, constructed a sprayer for the application of 2, 4-D from a tar distributor no longer of use to the maintenance force. This equipment was used chiefly for the effective treatment of Canada thistle growing in numerous parts of the district.

From these various sources of information and experiments, we have reached the conclusion that we must plan for the application of chemical weed killers in increased quantities this year if we are to meet the public's expectations and demands. And we further believe that the cost of such equipment, labor, and materials as these applications would require would be largely compensated by savings resulting from the large amounts now expended in hand-mowing those sections of right-of-way that are inaccessible to mowing machines.

ROADSIDE PARKS

We have been particularly successful since last July in obtaining authorization from the Commission for the construction of six new roadside parks and the enlargement of one other. Purchase was made also of one new parksite and another awaits only final surveys to be made for its purchase. Two parksites were also accepted as gifts last year. One donated by a conservation club, the other by an individual.

All standard details for park construction were redesigned last year and accepted by the Commission.

TREE TRIMMING

During the war years the man power shortage seriously affected the line clearance programs of the utility companies so that at the close of the war there was a rush on the part of these companies to remove the overgrowth of trees that was so seriously affecting the efficiency of their lines.

If line clearance is to cause a minimum amount of damage to a tree, it requires considerable knowledge of good tree-trimming practice and thought on the part of the workman. Many men whom the utility companies were hiring for their work, or were being hired by other contractors undertaking line-clearance work, were lacking in this knowledge and also knew little of the state laws and policies of the Highway Commission applying to trimming on a state highway right-of-way.

A two-day tree-trimming conference was held last March in the Lincoln Hotel in Indianapolis. Officials, managers, engineers, and line-clearance foremen were invited from all public utility and line-clearance contractors operating in Indiana. As a result of this meeting it was suggested that the State Highway Commission prepare a pamphlet outlining the procedure of securing permits and also outlining the types of trimming, maximum clearances, and so forth which the District Landscape Supervisor would accept.

This pamphlet was prepared by the Landscape Department and the initial distribution was made under letter dated January 1, 1948. Additional copies of this pamphlet can be secured at any time by contacting the department.

We are quite sure that during the coming year we will be able to complete a much larger number of roadside parks, more miles of roadside planting, and establish some definite weed eradication program to supplement that of mowing.