

Driving Issues in Utility Vegetation Management

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Today's Utility Vegetation Managers can be successful in an integrated vegetation management, IVM, program if they also consider an integrated resource management approach, IRM. Many vegetation managers are incorporating all the tools of IVM except herbicides due to a lack of knowledge on how to successfully implement them with an IRM strategy.

We know that IVM is a system of managing pest vegetation in which action threshold are considered, then all possible control options are evaluated and finally the management tactics are selected and implemented. Control options are based on worker/public safety, environmental impact, effectiveness, and site characteristics and economic. All utilities should be following ANSI A300 Part 7, Integrated Vegetation Management that can be found on the ISA Website. The tools are manual, mechanical, biological, cultural and chemical. Manual is generally chainsaws, chippers, hand saws, etc. Mechanical can be rubber tired or track mounted mowers or saws on booms. Biological can be goats, cattle and some biological pest controls are available. Cultural can be mulches, grass seeding, and agricultural control of right of ways. Chemical is the use of herbicides. There are many herbicides to choose from depending on the vegetation to be controlled and protected. Chemical application methods can vary from broadcast foliar, backpack foliar, basal stem, hack and squirt and spot gun. Chemical tools seems to be the most challenging for many utilities but can create more sustainable vegetation types at the most economical cost.

Many utilities see the IRM as a series of challenges to vegetation management. IRM can actually be the foundation to support the use of herbicides in your utility vegetation program. IRM is an interdisciplinary and comprehensive approach to land and natural resource management decision making that is designed to protect the ecological resources, cultural resources and economic resources. **IRM** is used to build mutual benefits between landowner and the Right of Way Owner. **IVM** Provides the tools to successfully manage for IRM.

Ecological resources are threatened, endangered and sensitive species, noxious and exotic species, wildlife and Fisheries, and watershed. Utilities need to see these challenges as opportunities to build partnerships with landowners and agencies. Threatened, endangered and sensitive plant species can be protected and their habitat enhanced if the vegetation manager is talking with the botanist about how they can protect and enhance the habitat that the plant needs. For example, when controlling fast growing cottonwoods in right of ways with protected elderberry in the understory, we can manually get clearance with climbers and then use hack and squirt to kill the remaining tree in place. You also get the added benefit of a cavity nesting snag for wildlife. These rights of ways can also be very valuable to pollinators and Vegetation Managers can gain support from the Pollinators Partnership.

Utility vegetation managers can also use the presence of noxious or exotic weeds in a right of way to build partnerships with the landowners and agencies. Usually including spot applications to control noxious weed within the right of way and access roads is a minimal increase in cost and builds long term partnerships with landowners.

Wildlife resources can be enhanced in right of ways with the encouragement of stable early succession plant communities. We have seen a decrease in early succession plant communities with the reduction of ranching and logging and the control of wildfires. Vegetation managers can encourage more species richness by maintaining early succession habitat next to mature forest types. Some of the endangered or threatened wildlife species can benefit from the right of way vegetation. Vegetation managers need to talk with wildlife biologist on what species would benefit from a wire zone-border zone concept. The use of backpack foliar or basal applications to selectively control invading trees and brush species usually have fewer disturbances on wildlife than manual and mechanical mowing.

Cultural resources are usually protected with the elimination of mechanical and some manual treatments. Backpack foliar or basal stem applications can control tree and brush species without any disturbance of the cultural resources. Vegetation managers should promote these IVM tools to help protect the cultural resources.

Economic resources can be the recreational resources that intersect right of ways. Partnerships with park managers, city foresters and arborists can help utility vegetation managers accomplish their goals and meet some of the landowner's goals. Bike and hiking trails can frequently benefit from selective herbicide use instead of the large manual mowers. The use of backpack foliar, basal or hack and squirt applications can be made in the late fall and winter for low impact on recreational use.

As utility vegetation managers, we need to use all the tools of IVM to create sustainable plant communities and remember that herbicides can be a cost effective and reduce many of the environmental issues of other tools when applied by professional applicators.

