

Macomb County Department of Roads
Natural Beauty Road Guidelines

Goals

The goal of the Natural Beauty Roads Program is to preserve in a natural, essentially undisturbed condition, certain county-local roads having outstanding or unusual natural beauty by virtue of native vegetation and/or other natural features within or associated with the right-of-way (ROW).

Objectives

1. To officially recognize and designate roads in the county-local system which meet the natural beauty criteria.
2. To keep these roadsides as they presently exist as long as possible.
3. To maintain and administer these roads so that they will continue to meet the criteria and provide safe public travel.
4. To mark such roads for the information of the public.

Disclaimer: The designation of a road as a Natural Beauty Road does not affect or restrict the activities of the Macomb County Department of Roads jurisdiction over that roadway. The Macomb County Department of Roads and utility companies have the right to control vegetation in connection with the installation, maintenance, repair, or replacement of utility facilities or perform construction, maintenance, repair, or replacement of public utilities crossing a Natural Beauty Road.

Designating a Roadway as a Natural Beauty Road

This process is only for roads under the jurisdiction of the Macomb County Department of Roads (MCDR). Designation of a city or village street as a natural beauty road must be made through the city or village legislative body.

1. 25 or more freeholders of a city, village, or township must sign the MCDR's Petition to Designate a Natural Beauty Road document and mail the form to the MCDR's Mt. Clemens office.
2. MCDR's staff will review the road based on how well the road meets each criterion. The review involves determining how well the roads meet the standard of a Natural Beauty Road described in the Criteria for Designation section. As a minimum Criteria 1,2,5, and 7 must be met if the road is going to be considered as a Natural Beauty Road. The applicant is required to submit documentation of the criteria when submitting the petition. See *Criteria for Designation*.

3. Within six months after a petition is received, MCDR will work with the local city, village, or township (CVT) to hold a public hearing at which residents can argue in favor of the designation or voice objections to the designation.
4. If the results of this review support the designation, staff will recommend that the MCDR approve the designation through an MCDR Staff Meeting.
5. Within 30 days after the hearing, if the MCDR and the legislative body of the CVT considers the designation desirable, it shall file a true copy of its resolution designating the portion of the county local road as a Natural Beauty Road.

Criteria for Designation

1. Character of Road – To qualify as a Natural Beauty Road, a road must have outstanding natural features along its borders, including native trees and other native vegetation such as shrubs, wildflowers, grasses, and ferns, and open areas with scenic or natural vistas, which, singly or in combination, set this road apart from other roads as being something unique and distinct. Native trees should be historic, or specimen trees based on documented historical and cultural associations or an unusual size for a certain tree species, provided they are in good health. We require a professional opinion from a qualified, certified, or licensed arborist or landscaper to meet these criteria.
2. Length – A minimum of one-half mile will be considered for designation as a Natural Beauty Road with exceptions below this length depending upon unusual features. Stretches will be continuous except where broken by a non-qualifying portion. Nonqualifying portions should normally not exceed one-half mile in length.
3. Roadside Development – Qualifying roads should preferably have no development along them, but such development as exists at the time the road is designated should be compatible with the surroundings, and should not detract from the natural unspoiled character and visual impact of the road area.
4. Road Bed – Natural Beauty Roads may be dirt, gravel, or hard surface. However, because hard surface local roads are usually paved with special assessments from local property owners, hard-surface local roads will normally not be designated as a natural beauty road.
5. Function of the Road – The existing road should function as a local access road (i.e., one which serves the adjacent property owners, and/or for those wishing to travel to enjoy the road's its natural beauty features). Any road serving as a collector or a higher functional classification, as defined by Federal standards, would not qualify to be a Natural Beauty Road.
6. Masterplan and Zoning – The Master Plan must support the proposed Natural Beauty Road. Zoning districts with low impact development such as an agricultural district supports the character of the natural beauty road by excluding more intense uses. The Future Land Use Map should also support the Natural Beauty Road by showing the future land use as an agricultural district. Other zoning districts that encourage low

impact development and encourage preservation of natural features will be considered.

7. Volume – The current average daily traffic (ADT) on an unpaved roadway should not exceed 500 vehicles for consideration as a natural beauty road. Designated natural beauty roads experiencing increases in excess of 500 vehicles per day will be reviewed for reconsideration of natural beauty road status. Any increase over 1000 vehicles per day on designated roads will automatically warrant consideration of the withdrawal of the designation by the MCDR.

Changes to Natural Beauty Roads – Permitting Activities in the ROW

Permitting third party activities in the ROW – Construction activities by others (not MCDR) are administered through the Permits Department at MCDR. For MCDR, the determination of “substantial damage to native vegetation” by a third party will be at the discretion of the MCDR Permit Engineer and authorized local and state permitting agencies, as applicable. If determined to be impactful to this degree, the MCDR Permit Engineer will work with the Planning Director of Department of Roads to notify the CVT within which the road lies. The CVT or Department shall provide for a public hearing and MCDR will take any comments received into consideration in approval or denial of the proposed activity.

Tree cutting activities in the ROW – For MCDR, the determination of whether tree cutting activities will “significantly impact native vegetation” will be at the discretion of the MCDR Roads Maintenance Supervisor or his designee in consultation with the Planning Director of Department of Roads and authorized local and state permitting agencies, as applicable. If determined to be impactful to this degree, the Roads Maintenance Supervisor will work with the MCDR to notify the CVT within which the road lies. A public information meeting or hearing will be held, as applicable, if required by law. A public information meeting or hearing will be held if it is in the public’s interest at the discretion of the Roads Maintenance Supervisor. The MCDR will take any comments received into consideration in approval or denial of the proposed activity.

Construction maintenance project in the ROW – For MCDR, the determination of whether MCDR construction maintenance activities will “significantly impact native vegetation” will be at the discretion of the MCDR Road Maintenance Supervisor or his designee in consultation with the Planning Director of Department of Roads and authorized local and state permitting agencies, as applicable. If determined to be impactful to this degree, the Road Maintenance Supervisor will work with the MCDR Planning Director to notify the CVT within which the road lies. A public information meeting or hearing will be held, as applicable, if required by law. A public information meeting or hearing will be held if it is in the public’s interest at the discretion of the Road Maintenance Supervisor. The MCDR will take any comments received into consideration in approval or denial of the proposed activity. No prior notification will be sent to the petitioner or the residents of a NBR, when MCDR maintenance crews schedule work

Construction development project in the ROW – For MCDR, the determination of whether construction development activities will “significantly impact native vegetation” will be at the discretion of the MCDR Director or his designee in consultation with the MCDR Planning Director and authorized local and state permitting agencies, as applicable. If determined to be impactful to this degree, MCDR will notify the CVT within which the road lies. A public information meeting or hearing will be held, as applicable, if required by law. A public information

meeting or hearing will be held if it is in the public's interest at the discretion of the Director. The MCDR will take any comments received into consideration in approval or denial of the proposed activity.

Revoking a Natural Beauty Road Designation

1. The Natural Beauty Road's designation can be revoked within 45 days of its designation by the property owners that are 51% or more of the linear footage along the Natural Beauty Road.
2. MCDR or legislative body of a CVT may revoke the road's designation at any time following its designation after holding a public hearing.

Accepted Maintenance Practices

In general, Natural Beauty Roads should receive the same level of maintenance performed on the road prior to designation, as long as the character of use and development of the road does not change to the extent that a higher degree of maintenance is necessary.

1. Mowing – Mowing should be continued where done previously, but should be limited to one swath (maximum of five feet) on either side as follows:
 - a. On one-lane trail or dirt roads, mowing should be immediately adjacent to the tracks.
 - b. On two-way gravel roads, mowing should be immediately adjacent to the edge of the graded surface.
 - c. On paved roads, mowing should be immediately adjacent to the edge of the pavement, back of curb, or edge of gravel shoulder where applicable.
2. Grading – Grading will be kept as narrow as possible. This should normally be kept within a total width of 10 to 15 feet for trail roads. On other roads, grading should continue as normally provided and be kept to a minimum to avoid disturbance of vegetation. It should be pulled back to avoid trees or unusual sites which have been designated.
3. Herbicides – Under no circumstances will herbicides be used to control or eliminate native roadside vegetation. Herbicide treatment may be necessary to protect natives through eradication of invasive species such as, but not limited to, Phragmites and Japanese Knotweed.
4. Dust Control – Where dust control has been the practice or becomes a necessity, a minimum level of dust treatment may be used.
5. Cross Drainage – Cross drainage must be handled where necessary to prevent damage to the road and possible washouts and other problems which may be detrimental to proper safety.
6. Signing – Natural Beauty Roads will be identified at entrance points by a specifically designated standard sign to be of a design prepared by the Department of

Transportation, and placed by the MCDR. The length of the designated road will be indicated on the sign.

7. Tree and Shrub Trimming or Removal – Where necessary for maintenance or repair and for safety or protection of the traveling public and vehicles in the opinion of the MCDR, tree branches and shrubs may be trimmed or whole trees removed. This should be done judiciously and with proper tools following best pruning and renewal practices.
8. Road Surfacing – The existing road surface at the time of designation should normally be continued. Necessary changes in surface to improve safety, drainage, reduce maintenance problems, etc., may be cause to undesignate the road if such changes disturb the natural beauty characteristics for which the road was designated.