**HISTORY of the Florida Department of Transportation Wildflower Program**

"In the early 1960s, the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) received numerous telephone calls asking the name of a flower growing long SR19/US27, just south of Tallahassee. The Department's Roadside Development Office investigated the matter and found that when the roadway was being built, the contractor bought sod for the roadside from a nearby cattle farmer, which contained a flower seed. The farmer had planted crimson clover (Trifolium incarnatum) in his fields as a winter forage for the cattle and to enrich the pasture soil with nitrogen. With guidance from the farmer, the department purchased additional crimson clover seed and proceeded to plant the seeds along Florida's roadsides. By 1963, the Florida Department of Transportation initiated the [Wildflower Program](http://www.fdot.gov/designsupport/wildflowers/Default.shtm) for the state's rights-of-way. Aesthetics, lower maintenance costs, and driver safety were the main reasons for the program.

At the same time, in north and central Florida, there was an emergence of an annual phlox along the roadsides, railroads, and large pastures. Whether the phlox is native to Florida is of considerable dispute. One story told is that the members of the Gainesville Garden Club placed seed, soil, and fertilizer in small gelatinous capsules and tossed the capsules out of their car windows as they traveled the area. Another tale gives credit to a railroad worker who claimed to have thrown the seed along the tracks on his many trips across the state. By what ever [sic] method, the phlox have been greatly admired and appreciated by all travelers through north and central Florida each March and April."

**Excerpt from:** *Florida Department of Transportation, Environmental Management Office. 1998. Wildflowers in Florida (4th ed.). Florida Department of Transportation, Tallahassee, FL.*

**Wildflower Program History Highlights**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **1963** | [**Wildflower Program**](http://www.fdot.gov/designsupport/wildflowers/Default.shtm) initiated | |
| **1973** | [**Operation Wildflower**](http://www.fdot.gov/designsupport/wildflowers/operationwildflower.shtm) - established by the Federal Highway Administration | |
| **1973-1980** | Emphasis gradually shifted from planting new stands to preserving and managing existing wildflowers | |
| **1981-1983** | Publication of *Management of Native Vegetation along Highway Rights-of-Way*Mowing guidelines modified to provide for the preservation of wildflower areas Signs erected for designating wildflower areas | |
| **1984-1987** | First wildflower research project funded by FDOT – *Establishment of Wildflowers along Highway Rights-Of-Way* | |
| **1985** | [Ella P. Wood Paths of Sunshine Award](http://www.ffgc.org/projects/roadside_beautification-paths_of_sunshine/images/procedures.pdf) established by the Florida Federation of Garden Clubs and FDOT Maintenance | |
| **1987** | Based on results of the 1984-87 research project, FDOT developed specifications and a 'pay item' for wildflowers to be included in normal roadway construction projects.  [**Highway Beautification Council**](http://www.fdot.gov/designsupport/HighwayBeautification/beauty/FHBC.shtm) established  Requirement enacted by the Federal Highway Administration to include l/4 of 1% of the estimated construction costs for the planting of wildflowers on all landscaping of roadways or other facilities using federal participation | |
| **1994** | ***Wildflowers in Florida*** published – In booklet, goal was set to purchase all Florida ecotype wildflower seed by 2003 President Clinton issued an [Executive Memorandum on Environmentally and Economically Beneficial Landscape Practices on Federal Landscaped Grounds](http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/WCPD-1994-05-02/pdf/WCPD-1994-05-02-Pg916.pdf) | |
| **1996** | Effort to obtain [Florida Specialty Wildflower License Plate](http://www.fdot.gov/designsupport/wildflowers/licenseplate.shtm) initiated by the [Florida Federation of Garden Clubs](http://www.fdot.gov/designsupport/wildflowers/FFGC.shtm), and financially supported by FDOT | |
| **1999** | Florida Specialty Wildflower License Plate enacted by the State of Florida | |
| **2000** | [Florida Specialty Wildflower License Plate](http://www.fdot.gov/designsupport/wildflowers/licenseplate.shtm) goes on sale | |
| **2001** | *Seeds for the Future: A National Native Wildflower and Grass Seed Production Workshop* is co-sponsored by FDOT | |
| **2002** | First Florida ecotype wildflower seed purchased | |
| **2004** | [Wildflower Program 2004](http://www.fdot.gov/designsupport/wildflowers/WildflowerProgProc-Mar2004.pdf) enacted | |
| **2013** | FDOT State Wildflower Specialist hired | |
| **2014** | [Wildflower Management Program](http://www.fdot.gov/designsupport/wildflowers/WildflowerProgProc-Jan2014.pdf) enacted (update of 2004 Procedure)  [**District Wildflower Coordinators**](http://www.fdot.gov/designsupport/wildflowers/wildflowercontacts.pdf) established in each District | |
| **2015** | [Evaluating the Importance of Roadside Habitat for Native Insect Pollinators](http://www.fdot.gov/research-center/Completed_Proj/Summary_EMO/FDOT-BDK75-985-03-rpt.pdf) - Final Report 2/2015 | |
| **2016** | 2016 [Wildflower Procedure](http://fdotwp1.dot.state.fl.us/ProceduresInformationManagementSystemInternet/FormsAndProcedures/ViewDocument?topicNum=650-030-001) updated | |
|  | | |