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Roadside Beauty—

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1987 A Texas Tradition



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"Beautiful, Beautiful Texas ~ Where the beautiful bluebonnets grow ~ We're proud of our forefathers ~ Who fought at the Alamo. ~ You can live on the plains or the mountain ~ Or down where the seabreezes blow ~ And you're still in Beautiful Texas ~ The most beautiful place that I know."

—W. Lee O'Daniel

Governor W. Lee O'Daniel wrote the words to "Beautiful Texas" back in 1933. But the highway department got involved in keeping our state beautiful even before that.

A Little History...

In 1930, then-State Highway Engineer Gibb Gilchrist instituted a policy of preserving trees along the highway right-of-way. One memo to division and resident engineers, maintenance superintendents, and county foremen outlined a policy for tree preservation. Adding a literary benediction to his plea, Gilchrist closed that particular departmental communication by quoting, "for the information of those who have not seen it," Joyce Kilmer's immortal poem, "Trees," in its entirety.

Three years later, Gilchrist hired a young landscape architect for the department and challenged him to make the highways beautiful. In a letter to all division and resident engineers, Gilchrist said, "...I want you to work with him and give him every assistance in the beautification of highways."

The beautification program, then as now, had a twofold purpose: The most obvious one, of course, was to add scenic beauty along the state's highways. The second one was to add safety to highway travel.

A booklet entitled "Suggestions for Roadside Development," published by the department in 1935, contained detailed drawings for placement of trees and shrubs to focus attention on hidden curves, unexpected hazards, and traffic signs.

Although the straight highways built in the early days were less costly in land acquisition, they proved to be more costly in maintenance when erosion stripped the soil from the steep slopes and deep ditches. The department's emphasis on planting trees and shrubs eliminated this problem and did away with the "monotony of sameness" that drivers faced on the long, straight Texas highways.

Current Programs...


The extent of the department's commitment to highway beautification is evident in its policy of dedicating 1 percent of the funds for new highway construction to landscaping.

That commitment includes several other programs as well, most of them with community involvement:

★ **DON'T MESS WITH TEXAS** is the battle cry for the highway department's war on litter. Spokesmen for the media campaign have included Texas musicians and sports figures. The campaign was begun in 1985, in response to annual litter pickup costs that had reached \$20 million, and were increasing in 15 to 20 percent increments each year. After the first year of the campaign, studies conducted by an independent research organization indicated a reduction of 29 percent in litter along Texas roadways. In addition to receiving statewide publicity, the effectiveness of the campaign has been noted in *The New York Times* and *Time* magazine.

★ **THE ADOPT-A-HIGHWAY PROGRAM** allows civic, fraternal, school, and other organizations to formally adopt a section of roadway on the state highway system for litter pickup. To date more than 1,200 groups have adopted sections of roadways in Texas. Although requirements vary from one highway district to another, generally two to three miles of roadway are adopted for a cleanup at least three times each year. If your group would like to adopt a section of roadway, contact your nearest highway department office and ask for the name of the District Adopt-a-Highway Coordinator, or call the department's Travel and Information Division in Austin at 512/463-8588.





The highway department's commitment to beautification has been enhanced in recent years by the involvement of the citizens of Texas. Any comments, suggestions or questions about the department's highway beautification policies should be addressed to:

**Travel & Information Division—HB
State Department of Highways
and Public Transportation
Dewitt C. Greer State Highway Building
11th and Brazos Streets
Austin, Texas 78701-2483**

★ **THE LANDSCAPE DEVELOPMENT MATCHING PROGRAM** also gets the public involved in highway beautification. Landscape projects along state roads are undertaken jointly by the highway department and civic organizations, private developers, local cities and other governmental agencies, and private groups. The program calls for a 50/50 sharing of costs, but the department will accept "in-kind" services, cash, or a combination of the two for the contributing group's 50 percent. These in-kind services can include design plans, labor, equipment, and materials. If your group is interested in participating in the program, contact your local highway department office, or call the department's landscape section in Austin at 512/465-6301.

★ The department's support of **KEEP TEXAS BEAUTIFUL, INC.** is designed to get grass-roots involvement with local litter reduction programs and individuals statewide. Since the department began supplementing KTB's budget in 1985, hundreds of additional community beautification groups have become involved in the organization's programs. For more information on Keep Texas Beautiful, call 1-800-CLEAN-TX.

★ **RESEARCH** on landscape design using wildflowers and other native plants has resulted in innovative methods for soil erosion control in environmentally sensitive areas. In constructing MoPac South in Austin, for example, the department employed native seeding and grasses to hold the soil together, ditches lined with a special matting which allows plants to grow through it, and extensive preconstruction planning to prevent pollution of Barton Creek by construction activities and heavy equipment.

