

## **Guidelines for Designation of Natural Beauty Roads**

(As provided for by Part 357, Natural Beauty Roads, of the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act, 1994, PA 451, as amended)

These guidelines have been prepared in consultation with the Department of Natural Resources, County Road Association of Michigan, and other persons knowledgeable in the identification of natural and aesthetic values.

### **Guidelines**

#### **Goals**

The goals of the Natural Beauty Roads program are to identify and preserve in a natural, essentially undisturbed condition, certain county local roads having unusual or outstanding natural beauty by virtue of native vegetation or other natural features within or associated with the right-of-way, for the use and enjoyment of local residents and the public in general without endangering the motoring public.

#### **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 insofar as possible without causing endangerment to the motoring public.
- 3) To maintain and administer these roads and the associated right-of-ways so that they will, once designated, meet the criteria and at the same provide safe public travel.
- 4) To mark such roads for the information of the public.

#### **Criteria for Designation**

1. Character of the 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 local roads in the county road system as being something unique and distinct from anything else in Genesee County.
2. Length - Normally a minimum of one-half mile will be considered for designation as a natural beauty road with exceptions below this length depending upon unusual and unique features. Stretches should be continuous except where broken by a non-qualifying portion. Non-qualifying portions should normally not exceed one-

half mile in length. Bridges, bridge approaches, culverts, and cross-tubes will not be included in a natural beauty road.

3. Roadside Development- Qualifying local county 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. Local zoning must be, and remain, compatible with the purpose of a natural beauty road.
4. Road Beds - Natural beauty roads may be of 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-Normally, the existing local road should function as a local access road, i.e., one which serves the adjacent property owners, and/or as a road serving those wishing to travel for the purpose of enjoying the roads natural beauty features. Any road serving as a collector or higher functional classification as defined by Federal standards would generally preclude designation as a Natural Beauty Road.
6. Speed-Natural Beauty roads are intended to be low-speed roads for purposes of enjoyment. It is recommended that hard surface roads be posted for a speed of not more than 35 MPH, gravel and dirt roads, 25 MPH. All speed limits are subject to an appropriate Traffic Control Order (TCO) being issued by the Michigan State Police. Requests for speed limit changes for a local road becoming a Natural Beauty road will be considered only subsequent to the designation of the road as a Natural Beauty road.

### **Accepted Maintenance Practices**

In general, natural beauty roads should receive the same level of maintenance performed on the road prior to designation and consistent with actions that are necessary to protect the safety of the motoring public, as long as the character of use and development of the road and along the roadway does not change to the extent that a higher degree of maintenance is necessary to protect the safety of the motoring public.

- 1) Mowing-Mowing should be continued where done previously, but should be limited to one swath (maximum of five feet) on either side of the road as follows:
  - a) On one-lane trail or dirt roads, mowing should be immediately adjacent to the edge 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 pavement.
- 2) Grading-Grading will be kept as narrow as possible. This should normally be kept within a total width of 10 - 15 feet for trail roads. On other roads, grading should continue as normally provided in a manner consistent with maintaining the safety of the motoring public and should be kept to a minimum when possible to avoid disturbance of vegetation. It should be pulled back to avoid trees and unusual sites which have been designated.
- 3) Herbicides-Under no circumstances will herbicides be used to control or eliminate roadside vegetation.
- 4) Dust Control-Where dust control has been the practice or becomes a necessity, a minimum level of dust control, as determined by the Genesee County Road Commission, may be used.
- 5) Cross Drainage & Bridges-Cross drainage and bridges normally will not be part of a Natural Beauty Road. However, when cross drainage is included in the portion of a local county road designated as a Natural Beauty Road, cross-drainage must be handled where necessary to prevent damage to the road, possible washouts, and other problems which in the opinion of the Genesee County Road Commission may be detrimental to the safety of the motoring public.
- 6) Signage-Natural Beauty Roads will be identified at entrance and exit points by a specifically designated standard sign to be a design prepared by the Department of Transportation and placed by the Genesee County Road Commission. The length of the portion of the road designated as a Natural Beauty Road will be designated on the entrance sign.
- 7) Tree and Shrub Trimming & Tree Removal-Where necessary for the safety and/or protection of the traveling public and vehicles, as determined by the Genesee County Road Commission after a public hearing, tree branches and shrubs may be trimmed or whole trees removed.
- 8) Road Surfacing-The existing road surface at the time of designation should normally be continued. Necessary changes in surface to improve drainage, reduce maintenance problems, etc. may be cause for the Genesee County Road Commission to at its sole discretion after a public hearing undesignate a Natural Beauty Road if such changes disturb the natural beauty characteristics for which the road was originally designated.

## Resources

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## **Guidelines for Petitioners for Natural Beauty Roads**

The Natural Beauty Road Act empowers County Road Commissions to dedicate only county local roads as Michigan Natural Beauty Roads. Specific procedures are to be followed by interested citizens when recommending the designation of local roads as Natural Beauty Roads to the Genesee County Road Commission.

The roads recommended must be county local roads before they can be considered for designation by the Genesee County Road Commission as a Michigan Natural Beauty Road; they must not be collectors or primary roadways. The status of a specific road can be obtained from the Genesee County Road Commission. Bridges and cross-culverts are generally not eligible for designation as a Michigan Natural Beauty Road.

Twenty-five or more of the land holders in a township may apply by petition to the Genesee County Road Commission for designation of a county local road or portion thereof as a Michigan Natural Beauty Road. Signers of the petition need not live on the road being considered for designation; however, they must own property in the township in which the proposed Natural Beauty Road is located. Signers must indicate their name and description of property owned. The petition must clearly state the name, location, length, and exact beginning and end points of the county local road being petitioned for designation as a Michigan Natural Beauty Road and must contain a statement of justification for the request for designation.

Additionally, in order for a petition to be accepted by the Genesee County Road Commission for consideration, the following information must accompany the petition:

1. A resolution from the township in which the local road being proposed for designation is required; the resolution must indicate that the township supports the designation of the road proposed as a Michigan Natural Beauty Road and that the township will pay the cost of the associated signage to include installation and maintenance costs.
2. An accurate map of the proposed Michigan Natural Beauty Road at a scale of not less than 1" to 200' identifying and showing the location of any and all native trees and vegetation and/or other natural features.
3. An inventory to include numbers and location of the trees and plants found in the county local road right-of-way proposed for designation as a Michigan Natural Beauty Road

4. A statement from the Michigan State University Agricultural Extension Service indicating which trees, plants, and vegetation located in the right-of-way of the proposed Michigan Natural Beauty Road are native to Genesee County.

Within six months after a petition is received, the Genesee County Road Commission shall hold a public hearing to consider designation of the described road as a Michigan Natural Beauty Road. Within thirty days after the public hearing, the Genesee County Road Commission will announce its decision as to whether the local road proposed shall or shall not be designated as a Michigan Natural Beauty Road. If a proposed local road fails to be designated as a Michigan Natural Beauty Road, the Genesee County Road Commission will not accept another petition for the same section of local road or any portion thereof for five years from the date of decision by the Genesee County Board of Road Commissioners.

The designation of a local road as a "Michigan Natural Beauty Road" will not curtail, cut-back, or alter existing road maintenance programs, such as tree-trimming and brush removal; will not prohibit the application of sound forest management in the right-of-way; and will not affect the right of a public utility to control vegetation in connection with the repair, maintenance, or replacement of facilities which were constructed in a road, its right-of-way, or across a road prior to the road's designation as a "Michigan Natural Beauty Road". Any change in zoning of properties abutting a "Michigan Natural Beauty Road" may be grounds for the Genesee County Road Commission to rescind the designation of "Michigan Natural Beauty Road".