

## POLICY FOR VEGETATION MANAGEMENT AT OUTDOOR ADVERTISING SIGNS

### 1) **PURPOSE:**

To maintain highway beautification in conjunction with sustainable roadside maintenance programs; protect public investments in roadside vegetation; and to acknowledge the advertising industry's desire to maintain advertising displays located adjacent to interstates and primary federal-aid highways for the benefit of the general traveling public.

To establish a means for owners or operators of legal conforming/non-conforming advertising signs to make a request for vegetation management for maintaining visibility of such signs and the criteria and process considered by GDOT in the evaluation of the request.

### 2) **AUTHORITY:**

Sections 32-6-75.1, 32-6-75.2, 32-6-75.3 (Control of Signs & Signals), Official Code of Georgia, Annotated

### 3) **SCOPE:**

All sign owners with GDOT-permitted outdoor advertising signs adjacent to Georgia interstates and primary federal aid highways who wish to maintain vegetation within the GDOT right of way or wish to ensure visibility will be required to comply with this policy for vegetation management. To ensure consistent maintenance of GDOT right of way, this process and criteria will be used by all of the permit review personnel in GDOT.

### 4) **REFERENCES:**

- 4.01 Georgia D.O.T. Standard Specifications, Construction of Roads and Bridges, most recent edition.
- 4.02 ANSI A300 (Part 1) – current version, American National Standard for Tree Care Operations – Tree, Shrub, and Other Woody Plant Maintenance – Standard Practices (Pruning)
- 4.03 National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES Phase 2) standards.
- 4.04 Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices, current edition.

### 5) **BACKGROUND:**

This Policy is necessary to implement statutory changes made in 1998, and to establish Department procedure for processing Permits for Vegetation Management at Outdoor Advertising Signs.

### 6) **DEFINITIONS:**

- 6.01 Acceptable condition -- The area is clear of debris, stakes, flagging, temporary fencing, and obstructions to conventional mowing and maintenance practices; stabilized by approved vegetative treatments; in conformance with Vegetation Management Permit conditions; and Georgia DOT Standard Specifications.
- 6.02 Cleaning – Selective pruning to remove only dead or broken branches.
- 6.03 Crown -- The leaves and branches of a tree measured from the lowest branch on the trunk to the top of the tree.
- 6.04 Crown Elevation or Raising -- The removal of lower tree limbs to allow clearance or visibility beneath the tree crown while maintaining the natural symmetry of the tree. A maximum of 25 percent of the leaf bearing crown may be removed.
- 6.05 Crown Reduction -- Selective pruning to decrease height and/or spread of the crown. Crown reduction shall be utilized in hazardous or safety applications only. A hazardous tree is one that has partially fallen, or that the Engineer determines is about to fall, threatening persons or property.
- 6.06 Drip line -- The peripheral limits of the horizontal crown of a tree spread vertically to the ground, provided, however, that the same shall not be less than a circle with a five-foot radius measured from the center of the tree.
- 6.07 Effectively destroy -- To cause, allow, or permit any act which will cause a tree to die, exhibit an unnatural shape or go into a period of unnatural decline within a period of two years from the date of the act. Acts which may

effectively destroy a tree include, but are not limited to: damage inflicted to the root system by heavy machinery or soil compaction; excessive pruning; severing the leader or leaders; stubbing mature wood; tree abuse; grade changes; damage intentionally inflicted on the tree permitting infection or pest infestation; application of herbicides or intentional fire damage to the trees intended to remain; infliction of a trunk wound that is thirty (30) percent or greater of the circumference of the trunk, bark removal, or the removal of sufficient canopy to cause the unnatural decline of the tree.

- 6.08 Exotic pest plants -- Non-native invasive plants also called noxious weeds, which are a problem in natural communities and ecosystems on public & private land. Examples: Kudzu (*Pueraria lobata*), Princess tree (*Paulownia tomentosa*), Privet (*Ligustrum sinense* and *vulgare*), Mimosa (*Albizia julibrissin*), Japanese honeysuckle (*Lonicera japonica*), Black Locust (*Robinia pseudoacacia*) and Johnson Grass (*Sorghum halepense*).
- 6.09 Hardwood -- Trees usually with deciduous leaves, including examples such as Maple, Oak, Cherry, Plum, Hickory, Ash, Beech, Willow, Poplar, and Sweetgum, with notable evergreen exceptions such as Magnolia and Live Oak.
- 6.10 Heading -- The cutting of an older branch or stem back to a lateral branch not large enough to assume apical dominance in order to meet a defined structural objective. Heading is not an acceptable pruning practice.
- 6.11 Mitigation -- Reduction of the impact of vegetation management activities with additional or supplemental work. Forms of mitigation include: (1) Choosing an area of least impact; (2) Restoration/re-vegetation by grassing all disturbed areas; (3) Erosion and sedimentation control.
- 6.12 Native plant -- A grass, herb, shrub, or tree which grows naturally within particular regions in Georgia, also called indigenous.
- 6.13 Nonhardwood -- A tree usually evergreen, including Pine, Spruce, Fir, Cypress, Juniper, Cedar and other conifers.
- 6.14 Pruning -- The selective removal of plant parts without damaging the natural symmetry of the tree or having a negative effect on the tree's long-term health. Pruning types are restricted to cleaning, crown elevation, thinning, and vista pruning only, as defined by the GDOT. Never remove more than 25 percent of the tree's leaf-bearing crown. Crown reduction shall be utilized in hazardous or safety applications only.
- 6.15 Removal or removed -- The elimination of trees or other vegetation.
- 6.16 Screened view -- The obstruction of view of the sign shall be determined as viewed from the centerline of the nearest lanes of traffic from an eye level of no less than 36 inches above the highway surface. A sign will be considered to have a screened view when the advertising message is not discernible when viewed in the defined sign-viewing zone in the direction the sign is facing.
- 6.17 Sign Viewing Zone (See APPENDIX A-1, A-2, A-3 and A-4) -- An area measured 500' maximum, as applicable, along the adjacent edge of the nearest travel lane on the same side of the highway to which the sign is permitted, which has:
- A. As terminus A, the point on the adjacent edge of travel lane immediately opposite the edge of the outdoor advertising sign face closest to the highway at a 90 degree angle to the roadway;
  - B. As terminus B, the point measured along the edge of pavement 500 feet (maximum) in the direction from which the sign is viewed; provided that the second terminus point shall not include areas within an interchange except along the outside shoulders of the outermost ramps and parallel to a state right of way; and
  - C. As terminus C, the point on the edge of the sign that is furthest from the road.
- 6.18 Target Viewing Zone -- A combined area of up to a 250' horizontal distance parallel to a state right of way and within the Sign Viewing Zone in which all non-hardwood trees may be removed when all other considerations have been met. For signs erected on or before April 20, 1998, which are less than 35 feet in height or which are lowered to such a height, the Target Viewing Zone may be increased to a maximum of 350 feet where all other requirements can be met. Hardwood trees greater than eight (8) inches in diameter, measured six (6) inches from the ground, may not be removed.

- 6.19 Thinning – Shall consist of selective pruning to reduce density of live branches. Thinning shall result in an even distribution of branches on individual limbs and throughout the crown. The maximum size range of the parts to be removed shall be one-and-a-half inches (1 ½”) in diameter. Not more than 25 percent of the leaf-bearing crown may be removed.
- 6.20 Topping – The reduction of a tree’s size using heading cuts that shorten limbs or branches back to a predetermined crown limit. To sever the leader or leaders or to prune a tree by the stubbing of mature wood. Topping is prohibited.
- 6.21 Tree -- Any living, self-supporting, dicotyledonous or monocotyledonous woody perennial plant which normally grows to an overall height of no less than ten (10) feet in Georgia.
- 6.22 Tree abuse
- A. Topping a tree or cutting that destroys a tree's natural habit of growth; or
  - B. Pruning that leaves stubs or results in a flush cut or splitting of limb ends including chemical or mechanical (shearing) mowing of trees; or
  - C. The use of climbing spikes, nails or hooks, except for the purpose of total tree removal; or
  - D. Pruning that is not in accordance with the policies and provisions hereof; or
  - E. Damaging a tree(s) while felling another tree.
- 6.23 Trim or Trimming – See Pruning.
- 6.24 Unique Vegetation -- All forms of vegetation including, but not limited to: historical specimen trees or plant communities, plants on the limits of their natural range, and canopy trees or shrubs that protect rare or endangered plants growing under them.
- 6.25 Vegetation -- All woody and herbaceous plants either naturally occurring or planted.
- 6.26 Vegetation Management -- All planned work activities relating to landscape and roadside development on public right of way. These activities may include the removal, or pruning of trees or other vegetation, grassing, litter and debris removal, erosion control, and any maintenance management of their related features.
- 6.27 Vista Pruning – Selective removal of lateral branches (major structural branches of the tree) to the branch bark collar on the trunk or a central leader. Never remove more than 25 percent of the trees leaf bearing crown. Vista pruning shall result in balanced symmetry of the tree.

## 7) APPLICATION FOR A VEGETATION MANAGEMENT PERMIT

- 7.01 A Permit for Vegetation Management at Outdoor Advertising Signs may be requested by submitting a completed Application for Vegetation Management at Outdoor Advertising Signs (GDOT Form # FH-0402) to the District Engineer or designee with (Maintenance) responsibility for the segment of state road to which the subject site is to be permitted. *(NOTE: This procedure does not apply to requests to trim or remove selected vegetation that screens on-premise signs or places of business.)*
- A. The Application form shall be available at GDOT’s State Outdoor Advertising Office and any District Office of the Department.
  - B. No person or entity may trim, prune, cut, or remove trees, shrubs, or herbaceous plants on public right of way to make visible or to ensure future visibility of off-premise outdoor advertising signs (billboards) without obtaining a Permit for Vegetation Management at Outdoor Advertising Signs.
  - C. For purposes of this Policy, the application of chemical control and tree abuse constitute removal of the affected tree, shrub, or herbaceous plant.
  - D. The approved application, including any conditions stated therein and all of the approved Vegetation Management Plan shall become part of the Permit for Vegetation Management at Outdoor Advertising Signs.

- 7.02 Applications for Vegetation Management at Outdoor Advertising Signs must be submitted by the Outdoor Advertising Sign Structure permit holder /sign owner.
- 7.03 The application shall contain:
- A. The name, address, telephone number, facsimile number, F.E.I.N. (Federal Employer Identification Number) or S.S.N. identifying their company, and e-mail address if available, of the applicant, the name of the property owner, the GDOT Outdoor Advertising Structure permit number, the cutting crew foreman's information, and the notarized signature of the applicant's authorized representative.
  - B. An affidavit stating the subject sign has had advertising messages thereon for some period during the preceding six months. (ATTACHMENT #1)
  - C. Time/Date stamped, color photographs of the sign [minimum of two (2) photos with different vantage points] providing evidence that the sign has been maintained and the entire Vegetation Management Zone [minimum of six (6) photos with different vantage points] taken within six weeks of the application date. The photographs shall depict a clear representative overview of all the vegetation within the View Zone. (ATTACHMENT # 2)
  - D. Vegetation Management Plan submittals:
    1. The Sign Viewing Zone Inventory Sheet (ATTACHMENT #3) that shows the applicant's Target View Zone and the tree sizes and quantities in the viewing zone. Trees located in the Target Viewing Zone shall be quantified and sized in a separate chart, as provided on the inventory sheet, from those trees outside of the Target Viewing Zone. The certified Arborist or Forester is responsible for guaranteeing the information on the inventory sheet is complete and accurate. They are not required to determine the location of the Target View Zone or the trees to be cut. The Sign Viewing Zone Inventory Sheet includes:
      - a. A typical 500 foot Sign Viewing Zone: The length of the Sign Viewing Zone is at a scale of 1" = 60'. The depth of the Sign Viewing Zone is not to scale. Delineate and dimension the Target View Zone, and any related site features (i.e. ESAs, wetlands, bridges, bodies of water, kudzu, etc.).
      - b. Average of the number of trees, four (4) inches in diameter and greater, in five random ten-foot by ten-foot square plots within the Sign Viewing Zone to determine an average density according to Appendix B-1. This average density will be used in Appendix B-2 to determine the values for trees removed and pruned. While not required, the Arborist/Forester may average the number of trees to determine average density.
      - c. A Target View Zone Chart: Quantify and size all of the trees four (4) inches and greater in the Target View Zone and place the totals in this chart. Locating and staking a Target View Zone is not required when no pine trees exist within a Sign Viewing Zone. However, all of the trees four (4) inches and greater within the entire Sign View Zone shall be inventoried and listed in the Non-Target View Zone Chart.
      - d. Where possible, two-inch classes are used for tree sizes, with a six (6) inch tree measuring 5.0 to 6.99. Because of stipulations in the law this is not possible for all Classes. See Appendix B-1 for the classes and the diameter ranges in which they fall.
      - e. A Non-Target View Zone Chart: Quantify and size all of the trees four (4) inches and greater that are outside of the Target View Zone (Non-Target View Zone) and place the totals in this chart. The applicant will not be required to fill in this chart if no vegetation is to be disturbed inside the Non-Target View Zone areas.
    2. Name and copy of the ISA certified Arborist or Georgia registered Forester responsible for guaranteeing accuracy of inventory sheet. (ATTACHMENT #4)
    3. Name and copy of license of personnel responsible for pesticide use and on-site observation, if applicable. (ATTACHMENT #5)
    4. A Summary of Tree Values Worksheet (ATTACHMENT #6) that calculates the Total Contributory Value of all proposed vegetative pruning and/or removal.

5. A Stacking Points Chart (ATTACHMENT #7) shall be submitted if the applicant proposes to remove pine trees having a diameter outside bark of 12 inches or more at a height of six (6) inches above ground level, in the Non-target View Zone.
6. An Environmental Impact Checklist (ATTACHMENT #8) identifying Areas of Potential Impact.
7. A Work Schedule for Vegetation Management for a minimum of one year. (ATTACHMENT #9) The Work Schedule shall be used for the initial proposed vegetation management work (pruning and/or removal activities, condition/treatment of site at completion of work, and the grassing and maintenance activities). The Schedule shall include the equipment to be used and the work method for the prosecution of removal, pruning, and site cleanup work to be completed within a continuous ten (10) day maximum duration. The Work Schedule shall also be used for proposed annual vegetation maintenance of the Sign Viewing Zone.

E. The payment of all fees: (See Appendix C)

1. Application review and permit fee of \$400.00 (non-refundable – to be submitted with the initial application and attachments); and
2. A Contributory Value check (non-refundable) equal to or greater than the value of the affected vegetation to be removed and/or pruned. The applicant shall submit the Contributory Value check only after receiving their notification of Provisional Approval of Permit. The payment of Contributory Value (established in the notification of Provisional Approval of Permit) is due with the applicant's final application signature.
  - a. A minimum flat \$500 fee is established for any and all vegetation management work. This minimum fee will include any and all work (pruning and/or removal) that affects vegetation under four (4) inches in diameter.
  - b. Determination of Value of affected vegetation, four (4) inches and greater, is established in Appendices B-1 and B-2. This is in addition to the minimum flat \$500 fee. Provide the Summary of Tree Values Worksheet of all affected vegetation (all trees and understory vegetation pruned, and/or removed).

F. A performance bond in an amount equal to the Contributory Value of the affected vegetation and proposed mitigation, if applicable (minimum \$3,500) with sureties in the amount acceptable to the Department to run concurrently with the permit. The performance bond shall be subject to forfeiture to the Department in the event of violation of these regulations or upon failure of the permittee to leave the sign viewing zone in a condition acceptable to the Department. Blanket bonds may be considered for owners submitting multiple applications.

G. The Permittee and their cutting crew Foreman must attend a scheduled pre-construction site meeting for the determination of all work limits, points of access, sedimentation and erosion control requirements, traffic control requirements (rush hour traffic limitations, etc.), Foreman contact information, concerns regarding existing site conditions, and finalized work schedule. GDOT reserves the right to determine the final location of each zone. As a part of a field review, condition of approval, and after approval notification, the permittee shall provide:

1. On-site field stakes depicting the limits of the Vegetation Management Zone (Sign Viewing Zone);
2. Field stakes depicting the limits of the Target View Zone. Stakes shall be a minimum 36 inches (900mm) wooden stake topped with fluorescent lime green flagging tape and installed at a maximum of 20 feet on center. If the stakes are damaged at any time, re-establish the stake line immediately before clearing operations resume.
3. Green striped flagging tape for vegetation removal identification and yellow striped flagging tape for vegetation pruning identification.
4. Required protective barriers around the drip line of trees to be retained prior to the field review.
5. For a larger (350 foot) Target Viewing Zone, verification of the sign structure height, ensuring conformance to all applicable regulations and policies.

7.04 All vegetation management proposed in the plan shall be in accordance with this Policy, GDOT Standard Specifications, and the following guidelines:

- A. No trees or vegetation shall be trimmed, cut or removed other than within an approved Sign-Viewing Zone.

- B. All vegetation to remain within the Sign Viewing Zone, shall be maintained in a healthy acceptable condition.
- C. All disturbed areas shall be in conformance with the grassing and establishment maintenance specifications of this policy and GDOT Standard Specifications. Indication of successful grass germination and adequate coverage is required.
- D. The Schedule for Vegetation Management may provide for the eradication of exotic pest plants or any other noxious weed growth and the View Zone may be maintained free of exotic pest plants.
- E. The Vegetation Management Zone shall be maintained by the yearly permit renewal from the Department.
- F. Hardwood trees having a diameter outside bark of more than eight (8) inches, at a height of six (6) inches above the ground level, shall not be removed.
- G. Work shall be accomplished during normal daylight working hours. No work shall be performed on Saturdays, Sundays, or designated State holidays.
- H. The Permittee shall give the local District Engineer, or designee, a minimum of 48-hour notification prior to any and all permitted and scheduled vegetation management activity on the right of way.
- I. The permittee must provide a minimum of five (5) working days notification of any changes to the approved work schedule.
- J. All vegetation management work, excluding inventory work, shall be performed under the direct supervision of a designated, English speaking, cutting crew Foreman. The Foreman shall remain on the site during all vegetation management activity that takes place after the pre-construction meeting. The Foreman is responsible for immediately notifying the Department of any violations, even if unintentional. All work shall be performed in accordance with ANSI A300 Part 1 and this Policy. Work shall meet all rules and regulations set forth by local agencies (County/State/Federal).
- K. Chemical control of vegetation is limited to selective control of invasive exotic pest plants and stump treatments. Herbicide storage, application, and disposal shall be in accordance with all of the manufacturer's recommendations and with State and Federal rules and regulations;
  - 1. Herbicides shall be certified for right of way use and approved by the Department.
  - 2. Perform all herbicide applications under the direct supervision of a person licensed by the Georgia Department of Agriculture to apply herbicides (Certified Pesticide Applicator) in the category of Right of Way use (27). Provide this information, as applicable. (ATTACHMENT #5).
  - 3. Herbicides shall have an approved dye for inspection purposes.
  - 4. Spray no herbicides in or directly adjacent to streams, rivers, or bodies of water.
  - 5. Invasive exotic pest plants may be removed and stump treated. There is no fee for exotic pest plants greater than 4 inches in diameter.
  - 6. All applicators shall wear proper safety attire as recommended by the chemical instructions.
  - 7. All chemical control operations shall be supervised by the District Maintenance Engineer or designee, with 48-hour notification.
- L. Wound dressing or paints will not be used.-
- M. Equipment that will damage the bark and cambium layer shall not be used. The use of climbing spurs is not permitted. All cut limbs shall be removed from the tree crown upon completion of the pruning.
- N. Vegetation management shall not proceed during specified times of the year if the University of Georgia Extension Service or other appropriate government agency identifies a specific disease or insect pest that poses a significant threat of spreading due to those activities during that time of the year.
- O. Pruning should not leave large open spaces in the general outline of the tree. Only Crown Raising and Vista Pruning are allowed on pine trees' lateral limbs. Cutting the leader of mature wood constitutes topping and is prohibited.
- P. Sabal palms shall not be pruned. Sabal Palms may be considered for relocation only and with bond requirements held until final acceptance after two growing seasons. The sign owner is responsible for relocating palms in areas designated by the GDOT engineer.
- Q. Erosion control shall be as directed by GDOT or per National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES Phase 2) standards and Best Management Practices (BMPs) consistent with the State Soil and Water Conservation Commission's Manual for Erosion and Sediment Control in Georgia. An erosion and sedimentation plan is not required unless the view zone is in or adjacent to an environmentally sensitive area such as a stream or wetland or as directed by the Area Permit Inspector. Vegetation Management (VM) activity is considered construction activity and not silviculture for the purposes of work on the GDOT right of way.

- R. All work shall be done without damage to native trees and shrubs that are being pruned, that are to remain in the Sign Viewing Zone, or that are adjacent to the Sign Viewing Zone. During any pruning or removal work, the permittee/contractor shall adhere to the following:
1. Place and maintain protective barriers around the drip line of all trees to be retained on the site to prevent their destruction or damage. The protective barriers shall be high enough to be seen easily by operators of trucks and other equipment. Protective barriers shall be bright orange and constructed of sturdy material (not flagging or ribbons).
  2. Clearing of vegetation within the drip line of trees designated for preservation shall be done only by hand or light rubber-wheeled equipment that will not damage tree roots or compact soils.
  3. Any trees designated to be preserved (within and adjacent to the Sign Viewing Zone) which are damaged during pruning and removal activities shall be treated as failure to comply with guidelines:
    - a. For damage that does not effectively destroy a tree, as determined by the Department, the permittee shall be required to convey to the state the amount equal to the Removal Value of the affected vegetation as listed in Appendix B-2. The Department may require all work be to be stopped until the damaged tree is properly pruned, if applicable, and the contributory value of the damaged tree is received.
    - b. For damage that does effectively destroy a tree, as determined by the Department, the permittee shall be required to convey to the state the amount equal to the compensatory damages of the affected vegetation as provided in TOPPS Document 6755-9. The Department may require all work be to be stopped until the damaged tree is properly pruned or removed, if applicable, and the mitigation fee for the damaged tree is received. If more than 25 percent of the leaf bearing crown of a tree is damaged the tree is effectively destroyed.
    - c. If a hardwood tree with a diameter of more than eight (8) inches is damaged, the action will be treated as an unauthorized removal of the tree.
    - d. Repeated and/or excessive damage to a tree(s) may result in immediate revocation of the vegetation management permit on file, forfeiture of bonds, and/or permanent denial of any future vegetation management permits.
- S. The work shall include proper disposal of all vegetation management related waste and debris on a daily basis. When completed, the sign viewing zone must be clear of all litter, debris, including natural debris such as fallen and dead tree limbs, branches and palm fronds, and be in acceptable condition for mowing by conventional mowing equipment. Applicants are not required to cleanup natural debris in the non-target view zone if no work is proposed there.
- T. Remove tree stumps and roots projecting through the surface of the ground by means of stump grinding equipment designed for this purpose, or by hand. Blasting or pushing the stumps out with bulldozers will not be permitted. Holes or voids created by the removal (grinding) of stumps shall be filled, graded and compacted with acceptable fill material.
1. Mowable Areas: All tree stumps, brush stumps, and roots projecting through or appearing on the surface of the ground, shall be removed by cutting or grinding flush with the surrounding ground surface.
  2. Non-mowable Areas (slopes greater than 3:1): All stumps and roots located on non-mowable slopes shall be removed to a height of three (3) inches or less above the surrounding ground. Stump height shall be measured from the top of stump to base of stump on the lowest side of the slope.
  3. The permittee is to request an interim inspection, with 48-hour notification to the Department, prior to any stump grinding work.
  4. Stumps may be treated with a selective herbicide, if approved by the Department. Herbicides used on the stumps shall have an approved dye for inspection purposes and shall be applied immediately (within 15 minutes) after cutting.
- U. All work shall include the proper protection of right of way slopes, drainage features, fencing, signage, guard rail and delineator posts. Any damage to right of way facilities shall be replaced and restored to the satisfaction of the Engineer. This cost shall not be included in provided mitigation values.

- 7.05 An approved Permit for Vegetation Management at Outdoor Advertising Sign authorizes the permittee to prune (cut or trim), or remove trees, shrubs, or herbaceous plants only within an approved Sign Viewing Zone (Vegetation Management Zone), which will be determined as follows:
- A. The approved Sign Viewing Zone (Vegetation Management Zone) shall be based on a continuous 500 maximum linear foot distance parallel to the adjacent edge of the travel lane, all within the Department right of way (See APPENDIX A-1, A-2, A-3 and A-4).

1. Hardwood trees measuring eight (8) inches in diameter or less, measured six (6) inches from the ground, may be removed from within a Sign Viewing Zone.
2. Non-hardwood trees measuring less than 12 inches in diameter, measured six (6) inches from the ground, may be removed from within a Sign Viewing Zone.
3. All Non-hardwood trees may be removed from within a Sign Viewing Zone for a combined total of 250 feet. This area is the Target Viewing Zone.
4. Pine trees having a diameter outside bark of 12 inches or more, at a height of six (6) inches above ground level, shall not be removed from a Sign Viewing Zone in such numbers as to reduce stocking to less than the minimum standard for full stocking for such trees, as determined by the Georgia Forestry Commission, over an area having a combined total of not less than 250 feet horizontal distance parallel to the right of way. Stocking may apply to the Non-Target Viewing Zone (the remaining 250 feet of the Sign Viewing Zone/Vegetation Management Zone).
5. For signs erected on or before April 20, 1998, which are less than 35 feet in height or which are lowered to such a height, the Target Viewing Zone may be increased to a maximum 350 feet where all other requirements can be met. Sign height shall be measured from the top of the sign to the ground directly beneath or to the road level, whichever distance results in the best view or the greatest elevation.
6. Any or all removed understory vegetation under four (4) inches in diameter, which screens a sign, shall be included in the \$500 minimum value-flat fee.

B. A sign shall be permitted a Sign Viewing Zone only within the right of way of the highway to which the sign is permitted. There shall be a permit required for each Sign Viewing Zone/Vegetation Management Zone requested. In cases where a sign has two sides, as in V-back signs, each side is considered a separate sign-viewing zone. A permit for each side (or face direction) of the sign, including all submittal requirements and review process shall be required for each view zone.

1. The Sign Viewing Zone for a right-view sign direction (see APPENDIX A-1) is an area measured along the right edge of the nearest travel lane on the same side of the highway to which the sign is permitted, which has:
  - a. As terminus A, the point on the adjacent edge of travel lane immediately opposite the edge of the outdoor advertising sign face closest to the highway at a 90 degree angle from the roadway;
  - b. As terminus B, the point measured along the edge of pavement 500 feet in the direction from which the sign is viewed, provided that the second terminus point shall not include areas within an interchange except along the outside shoulders of the outermost ramps and parallel to a state right of way; and
  - c. As terminus C, the point on the edge of the sign that is furthest from the road.
2. The Sign Viewing Zone for a left-view sign (See APPENDIX A- 2) shall be measured as above, except that terminus A and terminus B should be measured along the left edge of the nearest travel lane on the other side of the highway centerline.
3. The Target Viewing Zone is an area of up to 250-foot horizontal distance parallel to a state right of way and within the Sign Viewing Zone/Vegetation Management Zone in which all non-hardwood trees may be removed.
  - a. This 250 foot horizontal distance is not required to be contiguous if:
    - i. The combined area does not exceed 250 feet horizontal distance; and,
    - ii. GDOT determines that the vegetation to remain between a split Target Viewing Zone can be left undamaged above and below ground.
  - b. For signs erected on or before April 20, 1998, which are less than 35 feet in height or which are lowered to such a height, the Target Viewing Zone may be increased to a maximum 350 feet where all other requirements can be met. Sign height shall be measured from the top of the sign to the ground directly beneath or to the road level, whichever distance results in the best view or the greatest elevation.
  - c. The location will vary by site and will be established ONE time with the initial permit process at the pre-construction meeting. No revisions or subsequent permit requests for a different area will be permitted.

7.06 No Permit for Vegetation Management at Outdoor Advertising Sign shall be issued:

- A. For applications that are incomplete.



- B. For vegetation management to enhance the view of an outdoor advertising sign which does not have a currently valid sign permit which meets the requirements of state law with no pending violations.
- C. For mowing or non-selective chemical or mechanical control of grass or other vegetation.
- D. For signs that do not have a screened view.
- E. For work proposed within medians, interchange quadrants, or within interchange areas except along the outside shoulders of the outermost ramps and parallel to a state right of way.
- F. To remove any hardwood tree having a diameter outside bark of more than eight (8) inches at a height of six (6) inches above ground level.
- G. To prune, trim, or remove vegetation that has historic significance, is listed as an endangered species, is protected by state law, or has been planted as part of any local, state, or federal planting project.
- H. To remove Pine trees having a diameter outside bark of 12 inches or more at a height of six (6) inches above ground level in such numbers as to reduce stocking to less than the minimum standard for full stocking for such trees, as determined by the Georgia Forestry Commission, over an area having a combined total of not less than 250 feet horizontal distance parallel to the right of way. Exceptions may be made for signs that qualify for a larger Target Viewing Zone. (see 7.05.B.3.b)
- I. To prune, trim, or remove vegetation at signs originally permitted by GDOT after January 1, 1999, for a period of five (5) years.
- J. To prune, trim, or remove vegetation where such vegetation is part of a beautification project implemented prior to the vegetation management permit and/or where the beautification project is specifically identified in the Department's construction or landscape plans, permitted landscape projects, or agreements.
- K. To prune, trim, or remove vegetation when the District Engineer, or agent of the Department have determined that creation of the new Sign Viewing Zone will significantly disrupt natural systems, roadside aesthetics, or have other negative impacts on the operation of the highway.
- L. To create a new Sign Viewing Zone by pruning, trimming, or removing existing vegetation in the preparation of a new sign site or pending a permit or permit action.
- M. To an applicant whose record of conduct regarding the disturbance of trees or other vegetation on state rights of way by actions of theirs or others that has afforded a Sign Viewing Zone without conferring to the state the value of the vegetation disturbed.
- N. For a sign that has been unused for advertising for the preceding six consecutive month period.

7.07 Applications will be reviewed, approved or denied in accordance with the Georgia Outdoor Advertising Control Act, O.C.G.A. Section 32-6-70, et. Seq.

7.08 In the event two adjacent signs with overlapping viewing zones, but different Outdoor Advertising sign permit holders or sign owners, are involved in the permitting process, the GDOT reserves the right to amend the usual process for permitting vegetative management in order to avoid conflicting or potentially conflicting vegetative management activities.

- A. Each Sign Viewing Zone is permitted separately. Any new Vegetative Management Permits for Sign Viewing Zones that overlap existing, permitted Sign Viewing Zones will be held until the performance bond for the earlier, permitted vegetative management activities is released.
- B. Schedules for management/maintenance of the overlapping Target Viewing Zones once the initial pruning/removing/grassing are completed will be coordinated by the GDOT based on the individual vegetative management plans submitted by both earlier and subsequent sign permittees.
- C. When there are two adjacent signs with the same Outdoor Advertising sign permit holder or sign owner, the GDOT may, at their discretion, allow requests for vegetation management activities to take place simultaneously for both Sign Viewing Zones.

7.09 A Permit for Vegetation Management at Outdoor Advertising Signs is valid for the term of one year in accordance with all parts of the approved Vegetation Management plan. An updated permit application, a \$50 renewal fee, and an updated Annual Work Schedule (Attachment #9) shall continue to be due each year while maintenance activities continue. The date of the applicant's final signature on the permit is the Effective Date. Renewals are due by the Effective Date each subsequent year.

- A. The \$50 annual permit renewal is for a period of one year. It allows the applicant to maintain only the area of the Sign Viewing Zone initially modified.
- B. Trees and Vegetation four (4) inches in diameter and larger shall not be pruned or removed.

- C. Mowing and trimming new vegetation in the areas initially modified may be included in the schedule.  
 D. Any proposed chemical control shall comply with section 7.04.K guidelines.

- 7.10 Time/Date stamped, Color photographs [minimum of six (6) photos with different vantage points] providing evidence that all applicable standards for pruning and requirements of the permit having been satisfied shall be submitted by the permittee at the completion of the work. The photographs should depict different clear representative views of the vegetation pruned and preserved.
- 7.11 A permit placard (GDOT Form#FH-0404) must be displayed within the Vegetation Management Zone in clear view from the main travel way when any vegetation management is in process. The placard will be collected at the completion of work and re-distributed as necessary to facilitate permitted maintenance activities.
- 7.12 Release of Bond: The performance bond will be released upon final inspection, review and approval of as-built photos, and final acceptance by the Department.

## 8) GROUND RESTORATION/MITIGATION

- 8.01 Erosion control shall be as directed by GDOT or per National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES Phase 2) standards and Best Management Practices (BMPs) consistent with the State Soil and Water Conservation Commission's Manual for Erosion and Sediment Control in Georgia. An erosion and sedimentation plan is not required unless the Sign Viewing Zone is in or adjacent to an environmentally sensitive area such as a stream or wetland or as directed by the Area Permit Inspector. Vegetation Management (VM) activity is considered construction activity and not silviculture for the purposes of work on the GDOT right of way.
- 8.02 Distribution of chipping debris on non-mowable slopes, if they exist within the Sign Viewing Zone, is allowed un as long as the chips are evenly distributed and as long as the depth of chips is kept no more than three (3) inches deep. Non-mowable slopes are slopes steeper than 3:1. Chips shall be no larger than three (3) inches in size.
- 8.03 On mowable slopes, where the majority of trees are clear cut, understory vegetation shall be removed and grassing is required. The area must be left in mowable condition. The ground surface must be left without mounds and depressions in the final grade, with leaf litter and debris removed so grass seed is able to come into contact with the soil and germinate.
- 8.04 Restore original grades for any area that is disturbed by vegetation management activity. Grass and place wood fiber blanket, Type II on all areas disturbed by the work. For all disturbed areas, ensure that final stabilization occurs prior to completion of a workday or prior to a rain event, whichever comes first.
- 8.05 Use wood fiber blanket that meets the requirements of GDOT Standard Specifications – Section 713. Apply the blanket at the application rate of 3,000 lbs./ acre (3.4 Mg/ha) for 4:1 or flatter slopes, 3,600 lbs./acre (4.1 Mg/ha) for slopes between 4:1 and 2:1, and 4,000 lbs./ acre (4.5 Mg/ha) for slopes steeper than 2:1.
- 8.06 Apply the grass seed with the wood fiber mulch. Fertilizer, lime and mulching will not be required. Ground preparation, except as specified in section 8.03, will not be required unless specified by the Engineer. Plant permanent grass as specified.
- 8.07 Apply grass seed as follows:

Area	Type Grass Seed Mix	Application Rate
Mowable Areas Permanent Grass	Common Bermuda Common Bermuda Lolium sp. (annual rye grass)*	<u>24 lbs/acre (25 kg/ha) total</u> 8 lbs (9 kg) hulled -- 8 lbs (9 kg) un-hulled 8 lbs/acre (9 kg) *
Non-mowable Areas	<u>Native Grass Mix</u> Andropogon virginicus (broomsedge) Schizachyrium scoparium (Little Bluestem) Lolium sp. (annual rye grass)*	<u>24 lbs/acre (25 kg/ha) total</u> 8 lbs (9 kg) 8 lbs (9 kg) 8 lbs/acre (9 kg) *

\*(Include Annual rye grass in the grass seed mix only when seeding occurs in September through March.)

**9) FAILURE TO COMPLY WITH GUIDELINES-UNAUTHORIZED CUTTING, TRIMMING OR REMOVAL OF VEGETATION:**

In the event the PERMITTEE through any cause fails to perform any of the terms, conditions or provisions of the Vegetation Management Permit on their part to be performed, or if they for any cause fail to maintain the designated working area in a reasonable manner, or if the PERMITTEE violates any terms, conditions or provisions of the Permit, the GDOT shall have the right to terminate the Permit by giving thirty (30) days notice in writing of the termination and date of such termination to PERMITTEE. Violation of the Vegetation Management Permit will be grounds for the cancellation of the Permit, and the sanctions provided for in Rule 672-14 and the Georgia Outdoor Advertising Control Act, OCGA Section 32-6-70 et.seq. shall apply. The procedures provided under Section 32-6-95 shall apply the same as in cases wherein the Department believes that a sign is being maintained in violation of this part. Any person engaged in unauthorized pruning, trimming, or removal of vegetation in violation of Section 32-6-75 O.C.G.A. is subject to a penalty of \$10,000 to \$20,000 per incident and restitution in a amount equal to the appraised value of the trees or vegetation, or both, which were unlawfully trimmed or removed, as outlined in this Policy.

**10) SAFETY**

10.01 At all times, the PERMITTEE shall install and maintain traffic control in accordance with the diagram in Appendix D – VM Activity Traffic Control or the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD), current edition. For applications not covered in these references and for work requiring lane closure(s), a detailed traffic control plan shall be submitted to the department for review.

10.02 Access to the site shall be only from the mainline.

**11) HIGHWAY BEAUTIFICATION:**

No vegetation that will interfere with the visibility of an outdoor advertising sign face shall be planted within an active permitted Vegetation Management Zone.

**12) TRAINING:**

The General Maintenance Office-Landscape Architecture Section will provide training as necessary.

**13) FORMS:**

The following forms will be incorporated by reference into Rule Chapter 672-14 O.C.G.A. and are available in the Forms Library:

Form FH-0402, Application for Vegetation Management at Outdoor Advertising Signs

Form DOT-0403, Vegetation Management Permit Record of Sale of Goods or Services / Cash Receipt Transmittal

Form FH-0404, Permit for Vegetation Management at Outdoor Advertising Signs

**PART II VEGETATION MANAGEMENT APPLICATION/PERMIT PROCESSING**

**14) APPLICATION/PERMIT PROCESSING**

**14.01** The District Maintenance Engineer or designee shall accept Applications for Vegetation Management At Outdoor Advertising Signs (Form #FH-0402) and collect application fees. The District Maintenance Engineer or designee shall complete a Vegetation Management Permit Record of Sale of Goods or Services Form (GDOT Form DOT-0403). The applicant's copy shall be returned by certified mail or hand delivered to the applicant and a copy retained for the District file.

- A. The Fees will be submitted to the District Administrator's Office for holding until the District Outdoor Advertising Agent performs an initial review regarding overlapping Vegetation Management permits on the site and checks for required current legal permit. If there is a conflict, the fee(s) are refunded. If there is no conflict, then the Outdoor Advertising Agent requests that the fee(s) be deposited into a fund designated for highway beautification. All fees and contributions to the designated fund should be entered in such a manner that monitoring (confirmation of funds) by Department personnel and the Roadside Enhancement and Beautification Council is readily accessible.

- B. Review by the District Outdoor Advertising Agent of all Applications for Vegetation Management at Outdoor Advertising Signs and accompanying vegetation management plans shall consider all criteria listed in this policy and all other related Department policies, rules, procedures, standard indexes, and manuals. Where deemed appropriate by the District Outdoor Advertising Agent, the applicant may be required to provide an access plan for the Vegetation Management Zone. The District Outdoor Advertising Agent's review shall include the following:
1. The Outdoor Advertising Agent confirms the accuracy of all applicant and sign information provided by the applicant on the application and confirm the legal status of the sign and sign permit. The Outdoor Advertising Agent completes the Verification Section on the application by corresponding with the Access Manager, Roadside Enhancement Coordinator, and by reviewing all required application attachments. If the Environmental Impact Checklist (Attachment #8) indicates involvement of potential environmental impact, the District GDOT Environmentalist may indicate additional submittals required by the applicant as the legal status of the work relates to NEPA and Section 404 jurisdictional permit requirements. If the Department determines potential environmental impact, the applicant may be required to hire a professional to complete further studies. The following District Staff shall make every effort to confirm the following within 4 working days of request:
    - a. District Access Manager confirms that the Sign Viewing Zone is not in an area having a landscape encroachment and/or mowing and maintenance agreement.
    - b. District Roadside Enhancement Coordinator confirms that the Sign Viewing Zone is not in an area having planted vegetation.
  2. The Outdoor Advertising Agent confirms the accuracy of all attachments to the application, including review for value of affected vegetation, additional contributions value due, and bond requirement. When the Outdoor Advertising Agent determines that a sign site cannot be permitted, the application should be returned to the applicant.
  3. The District Outdoor Advertising Agent completes the Recommendations Section of the Application. This includes verifying the Contributory Value amount totaled in the attachments and determining the bond amount, stipulating any additional conditions of the permit, and recommending approval or denial of the permit.
- C. Final approval or denial of all Permit (s) For Vegetation Management at Outdoor Advertising Signs is made by signature of the District Maintenance Engineer or designee. Applications that cannot be approved should be returned to the applicant by certified mail, with appropriate comments that will indicate revisions necessary to gain approval, if applicable.
- D. When an Application for Vegetation Management at Outdoor Advertising Signs is approved and signed by the District Maintenance Engineer, the Outdoor Advertising Agent returns it to the applicant for signature of agreement to abide by permit requirements. (The Effective Date of this signature is also the date for subsequent renewals.) A request for the bond, insurance verification, and contribution check, is included. The signed original plus two additional copies are returned to the Outdoor Advertising Agent. A disclaimer is added to notify the applicant that there will be no refunds once the application is signed.
- E. Once the signed application and requested information are submitted to the District Outdoor Advertising Agent, they complete a Vegetation Management Permit Record of Sale of Goods or Services Form (GDOT Form DOT-0403) for the contribution check. The applicant's cash receipt and a Document Receipt for the performance bond shall be returned by certified mail or hand delivered to the applicant and a copy retained for the District file.
- F. The Document Receipt notifies the applicant of approval and includes instructions to contact the Area Permit Inspector to receive the approved permit and schedule a field review.
- G. The District Administrative Office sends checks/fees to the General Accounting Office to be deposited into a fund designated for highway beautification.
- H. The District Outdoor Advertising Agent sends one permit package to the appropriate Area Permit Inspector with a permit Identification Placard.
- I. The applicant contacts the Area Permit Inspector to schedule a field review. The Area Permit Engineer shall coordinate a pre-construction site meeting with the permittee/contractor, and their designated Foreman for the determination of all work limits, points of access, traffic control requirements, erosion control requirements,

tree preservation requirements, and work schedule. If discrepancies are found between the permit, field conditions, or the work being performed, the Inspector or agent of the Department will stop work and notify the District Outdoor Advertising Agent. The permit will be re-evaluated and could be subject to revocation.

- J. Individual permit placards (Form FH-0404) will be issued for each approved Vegetation Management Zone. The permit placard will share the same vegetation management permit number found on the application.
- K. The Area Permit Inspector shall notify the District Outdoor Advertising Agent of the date when vegetation removal will begin.
- L. The Area Permit Inspector and any other agent of the Department shall periodically visit permitted Vegetation Management Zones to verify compliance with conditions of this directive and Vegetation Management permits. If a violation is detected, the agent of the Department shall notify the District Outdoor Advertising Agent and District Maintenance Engineer or the State Maintenance Engineer. No other Permit(s) for Outdoor Advertising Signs shall be issued to the same applicant until the appropriate fine or contribution funds are collected or vegetation management permit requirements are satisfied.
- M. For final acceptance, the Area Permit Inspector or agent of the Department shall perform a final site inspection for review and approval of work. Approval of work is not final until the Area Permit Inspector or agent of the Department completes written certification of finished work to the District Outdoor Advertising Agent. The applicant shall submit a minimum of six (6) as-built photos with different vantage points to the Area Permit Inspector before certification can be made.
- N. The Area Permit Inspector shall send the applicant's six as-built photos and written certification letter to the District Outdoor Advertising Agent for district files. The Area Permit Inspector must also collect surrendered Vegetation Management Identification Placards.
- O. The Outdoor Advertising Agent shall maintain all files relating to applications and permits for Vegetation Management at Outdoor Advertising Signs. All applications / permit (s) for Vegetation Management at Outdoor Advertising Signs shall be entered and monitored by Department personnel in the (newly created) Vegetation Management Permits Information Tracking System. The Office of Maintenance shall establish a yearly application renewal & fee collection process, and collect fines for unauthorized vegetation management.

**14.02** The Outdoor Advertising Agent is responsible for maintaining a file system where a field inspection for vegetation management is conducted prior to the issuance of a sign renewal permit, monitoring advertising usage (6 month rule), sign structural requirements, the legal process of deeming a sign as illegal, non-conforming or in violation of vegetation management permit requirements, and the enforcement of the sign removal rules.

**14.03** The arborist/forester is required in the permit process to provide un-biased information on the application. If the arborist/forester is being paid by the applicant for any other purpose than the inventory work required for application submittal, a conflict of interest is created.

To avoid a conflict of interest, the arborist/forester who inventories any sign view zone for an applicant shall not be involved in any way with the vegetation removal on any of that applicant's sign view zones. This includes any financial gain or tie to the applicant removing vegetation, except to the extent that the applicant compensates the arborist/forester for the service of inventorying the sign view zone(s).

The arborist/forester must disclose to the Georgia Department of Transportation any business, family relations, or other personal interest that could influence their professional judgment on the vegetation management sign view zone(s) or gives the appearance of a possible conflict of interest.