

The Benefits of Maintenance Mowing

The City of Prior Lake operates many parks, trails, and natural areas for the enjoyment of residents and visitors. To keep these facilities functional and looking great, City maintenance crews focus on critical areas for mowing and other vegetation removal. While many natural areas can be left untouched, some require periodic maintenance including trail corridors, restored prairies, and areas close to stormwater infrastructure (the system of catch basins, pipes, and ponds that manage and treat runoff water).

Mowing along trail corridors and intersections enhances visibility and safety while promoting the growth of perennial grasses and flowers instead of weeds and nuisance woody species such as willows, sumac, cottonwood, and buckthorn. Keeping trail corridors open also provides access for City vehicles so crews can perform other maintenance and repair work.

There are several prairie restoration sites throughout the City Park system that require frequent mowing during the establishment phase and then annual or biennial mowing or even burning in the long-term. By setting the deck of the mowers at least 6 inches high, this maintenance mowing removes annual weeds and undesirable woody species while encouraging native prairie plants. Our prairie areas serve as excellent wildlife habitat and improve water quality by filtering runoff. Crews are careful to schedule mowing for after the bird nesting season.

Removing vegetation around stormwater infrastructure is very important to the function of our stormwater management system. In areas where trees were previously allowed to grow unchecked next to concrete pipes and other structures, City crews have had to perform expensive tree removals and even structure replacements. By mowing certain areas periodically, we avoid having to remove woody species by hand or having to replace structures – this saves taxpayer dollars. Additional benefits of this targeted vegetation clearing include the encouragement of grasses and wildflowers, removal of invasive woody species such as buckthorn, and the reduction of material (primarily branches and leaves) near ponds that can clog pipes and pond structures, increasing the risk for localized flooding.

City staff works hard to balance the need for undisturbed natural areas with the maintenance needs of our infrastructure, all while minimizing costs to taxpayers.