

Guidelines for Seed Collecting
On Department of Natural Resources Land
Instructions for Collectors

The pressure to allow seed collecting from prairies and other communities stems from the lack of other remnant areas with local genotypes where seed can be collected. This shortage leads many agencies, private landowners, natural landscapers, and nursery operators to give up the idea of native plant establishment or to import easily available, less expensive, but genetically inappropriate seed. The long-term solution to this problem is to have enough acres of restored areas of local ecotypes to allow those who wish to acquire seed to do so.

Seed collecting influences a natural community by removal of seeds and chaff and by physical disturbance of the site. The seed crop is part of the community and participates in a variety of roles. The notion of seed going to waste is a misconception that follows from disregard for the roles of seed in food chains, soil nutrient dynamics, seed banks, and other ecological processes. The effects of repeated seed harvest on, for example, associated organisms, soil seed banks, and the ability, of the community to heal after natural or cultural disturbance is largely unknown.

Concern about potential adverse effects and the need to protect natural areas for the prime purposes of safeguarding biodiversity and its dynamics and providing for research and teaching are reflected in the recommendations that follow. At the same time, the recommendations address the important role genetic pools in natural areas can play in increasing biodiversity in Wisconsin.

1. Permitting Recommendations

Present law (NR 45.04) and (NR 45.13) prohibits the collection of plants and plant parts, including seeds, from Department land and State Natural Areas without a permit. This document is established to govern the issuing of permits by the Bureau of Endangered Resources.

Endangered and threatened species are protected by an additional permitting process (Permit for Endangered and Threatened Species). In general, seed of such species can be collected only as part of a recovery effort.

- a. Seed collecting will be by permit only.
- b. Permits may be issued for restoration projects undertaken by a government agency or non-profit organization
- c. Commercial native plant nurseries and individuals may be permitted to harvest seeds for stock plants of known regional genetic source not otherwise available for seed and plant production purposes. These stock plants must be established in Wisconsin production beds and should be sold only for use within the plants genotypic region.
- d. Permits may be issued to collect rare species for seed bank storage or a specific recovery program.

2. Permit Criteria: Staff Considerations

- a. Collecting will be permitted only where target species are known to be abundant.

NOTE: Consideration should be given to the relative abundance of a given species and will take into account the reproduction and average longevity of that species.

- b. Never harvest more than 10 to 25 percent of available seed. This will depend on the species, its relative abundance, and the amount of seed normally produced by that species.

NOTE: Consideration should also be given to the relative importance of seeds to the reproduction and average longevity of a given species. Limits on short-lived, non-vegetative spreading species should be much more conservative than those on long-lived, rhizomatous species.

- c. Seeds from a species on Wisconsin's Endangered and Threatened Species List cannot be collected without a Permit for Endangered and Threatened Species. Requests to harvest species of special concern will be treated on a case-by-case basis.
- d. After three to five (species dependent) years of collecting the same species, the permittee should collect from their restoration efforts and not from Department land.

3. Permit Criteria: Instructions to Harvesters

- a. In requesting a permit the applicant must identify the purpose of the project, list the species and desired quantity by site, cite acreage to be planted, name those who will do the actual collecting, and describe the collection methods to be used.
- b. Harvesters should collect from as many sites as possible within a given ecoregion to disperse the impact and get better genetic representation. An exception to this general guideline is the restoration of an area adjacent to an existing remnant. In this case all seed should be collected from the adjacent remnant.
- c. Harvesters must check to be certain the seed is mature and should not collect immature seed.
- d. Harvesters must disperse the collecting effort throughout the designated area.
- e. Hand harvesting and hand tools, e.g., shears and box combs, are acceptable harvest methods. Larger mechanical devices are prohibited. Other tools will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.
- f. The permittee is required to submit a report detailing the amount of seed collected by species and a map showing where each species was collected within the area.
- g. The permittee, except for nurseries, should allow collecting by others on their restorations where possible.