

## **Do not mow the ditches!**

For several years, we have been asking residents to clean the ditches in front of their property. By cleaning it was meant to remove garbage and ensure that no debris or accumulation of sediments prevented the free movement of water. That could be stones, sticks or other such obstructions. This still applies, however some citizens have gone a step further and have begun to mow and landscape the ditches and this is leading to problems.

The vegetation in ditches plays an important role in stabilizing the soil and limiting erosion. It also slows down the flow of water reducing its erosion capacity thus permitting the water to percolate into the soil and prevent eroding the embankments. Much of the vegetation also filters the water, in the case of bulrushes; they are capable of removing heavy metals such as lead and mercury.

The humid nature of many ditches is often responsible for the growth of a wide array of wildflowers: asters, daisies, jewelweed, bladder campion, hawkweed, wild iris, joe pye weed and cow vetch are just a few of the myriad of plants that grow naturally in ditches, and these plants support bees and butterflies along with insects that certain songbirds thrive on, and all of which are under threat due to habitat loss. A good example is found along Route 364 between Cote St. Gabriel and Meadowbrook.

These reasons, along with maintenance costs, are why the MTQ is rethinking its policy of mowing the medians on its highways, and sections of the 417 are no longer cut until the autumn when the vegetation has died.

It is possible that some invasive weeds such as ragweed can grow, but these can be removed manually without affecting the surrounding plants, so put the mower away and let a natural garden grow!