

RESOLUTION

Resolution Appropriating Funds for FY2025 Artificial and Living Snow Fence (82)

WHEREAS, McHenry County has determined that there is a benefit to the public when snow fence is installed along County Highways for improved motorist safety and efficient snow removal operations; and

WHEREAS, McHenry County also determined that implementing an Artificial Snow Fence, Living Snow Fence Program where local farmers are compensated to leave corn or agreed upon natural barrier standing in fields to serve as barriers to blowing snow will result in improved winter driving conditions on County Highways and improve the safety for motorists; and

WHEREAS, 605 ILCS 5/5-412 grants the County the authority to "contract with persons growing row crops or agreed upon natural barrier on land adjacent to county highways to buy standing strips of such crops to remain in place to act as snow breaks along such highways in those places where experience shows that drifting snow has been an obstruction to traffic".

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, by the McHenry County Board that establishment of an Artificial and Living Snow Fence Program is hereby approved; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that there is hereby appropriated from the FY2025 budget the sum of one hundred thousand dollars (\$100,000.00) from the County Option Motor Fuel Tax Fund, split between Highway Materials and Highway Maintenance Contracts to compensate farmers for providing Living Snow Fence and replenishment of artificial snow fence materials; Fund-Dept.-Div.-Main Account 262-82-8240-519000 (Highway Materials) and 262-82-8240-413150 (Highway Maintenance Contracts); and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, as multiple contracts will be entered into which will be substantially similar in nature as to the attached, the County Engineer is hereby authorized to execute the agreements under this program; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that these purchases are hereby designated as Section 25-00000-15-GM; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the County Clerk is hereby directed to distribute a certified copy of this resolution to the County Board Chairman, the County Administrator, the Chief Financial Officer and the Director of Transportation/County Engineer.

DATED at Woodstock, Illinois, this 19th day of November, A.D., 2024.

Michael Buehler, Chairman
McHenry County Board

ATTEST:

Joseph J. Tirio, County Clerk

RESOLUTION

SUBJECT: Resolution Appropriating Funds for FY2025 Artificial and Living Snow Fence (82)

Board / Committee Action Requested:

To approve the resolution approving the Artificial and Living Snow Fence Program and appropriating funds for the 2024-2025 winter season.

Background: Every year for the last 28 years, MCDOT maintenance staff spends countless hours installing and removing artificial snow fence along sections of our County Highway system to prevent snow drifting on rural roadways. This effort helps the motoring public by reducing impassable roadways and hazardous conditions while at the same time assisting the MCDOT's maintenance section by allowing more time before crews need to be dispatched across the County to handle blowing snow. The snow fence is also very beneficial after an event as drifting often occurs requiring a special callout of MCDOT personnel to handle blowing and drifting snow. Periodically the artificial snow fence and materials need to be replaced due to wear and tear.

In 2013, a Living Snow Fence resolution was passed for this program and farmers were sought to join the program. The MCDOT was unable to recruit any farmers as State Statute at the time only allowed the County to offer up to 110% of the market value of the crop bushel price. Farmers indicated it wouldn't be worth their time to bring equipment back out to pick the remaining crop and work the land.

In 2017, HB1800 was brought forward and passed which amended the State Statute (605 ILCS 5/5-412). This law made it possible for the County to offer above the 110% market value of the crop. With this amended statute, the MCDOT, working with the Farm Bureau and the McHenry Lake County Soil & Water Conservation District, revisited the approach to getting farmers to participate in this program. This new law was presented to the Farm Bureau on February 14, 2018 to which a favorable response was received such that the program could now move forward.

Discussion: The Strategic Highway Research Program has found that it costs 100 times more to plow snow than to use a snow fence to trap it. Over the last 26 years, several states across the Midwest have been using programs where farmers are paid to leave crops standing during the winter months to assist with blowing snow. States such as Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin have successful statewide programs to incorporate living snow fences into their Winter Maintenance Operation Program.

State and national studies report that living snow fences can reduce overall costs associated with these programs by 30 to 50%, not to mention the added safety to the public.

The MCDOT first implemented its own Artificial and Living Snow Fence Program for the 2018-

2019 winter snow season.

The MCDOT had its first farmer participate in the program during the winter of 2018-2019. This amounted to 1,000 feet of protection along Kishwaukee Valley Road from Dimmel Road east on the north side of the road. The living snow fence received a lot of attention, and we were hopeful other farmers would join the program. MCDOT had three farmers partake in the program on Kishwaukee Valley / Hughes intersection, Marengo at Harmony roads along with Main Street coming out of Huntley during the 2019-2020 winter season. In 2020-2021 MCDOT expected to have nine farmers partake in the program, but only ended up with two farmers as the market price for corn increased dramatically during the 2020-2021 winter season. This past winter we started having farmers show more interest in the program. More farmers are showing interest for the coming 2024-2025 winter season.

After reading an article highlighting what the State of Minnesota is providing their farmers, MCDOT attended the McHenry County Farm Bureau (MCFB) meeting in January 2023 where we presented some other options to participate in the program. The biggest change to our program is that we are offering other options to use besides corn, and we are increasing our offer from \$1,000/acre to \$2,000/acre. This works out to \$2.00/ft. where it currently costs the McHenry County Division of Transportation \$3.88/ft. for labor and materials to install artificial snow. It costs a farmer approximately \$1,600/acre from start to finish to raise a crop. Time is very limited when installing snow fence, two key factors include weather and the farmers harvest that will dictate how much fence can be installed. To date, the most snow fence MCDOT has installed is seven miles. Unfortunately, there are over 40 miles of critical areas of blowing on the County highway system. We anticipate this program will offer incentive for more farmers to participate. The MCFB feels the additional options will entice farmers to participate in the program.

Impact on Human Resources: None.

Impact on Budget (Revenue, Expenses, Fringe Benefits): The \$100,000 for this program is included in the draft FY2025 budget from the County Option Motor Fuel Tax fund. Bringing the resolution forward prior to the beginning of the fiscal year allows the farmers ample time to prepare for and participate in the program.

Impact on Capital Expenditures: None.

Impact on Physical Space: None.

Impact on Other County Department or Outside Agencies: None.

Conformity to Board Ordinances and Policies: This program has been reviewed by the State's Attorney and conforms to County ordinances and policies.