

Making small forest roadways in your woodlot

Forest roadways and large trails provide the most important means of accessing forests for removing firewood, ATV-based recreation, hiking, and other activities. Unfortunately, forest roads cause more erosion than any other aspect woodland maintenance. When sediment washes away from forests, it usually starts from erosion along poorly built forest roadways.

Even though forest roads are important for harvesting timber, reforestation, recreation, and forestry projects, they should be placed only where necessary. Avoid building new roads in forests if it is not necessary.

The basic problem of forest roads is that they create a harder, compact surface within woodlands. Forest soils are naturally permeable and sponge-like. Forest roads, on the other hand, are much more impervious, causing water from rain and snow melt to run across the surface, rather than soaking in. Uncontrolled surface runoff washes away thousands of tons of soil over time. Eroded soil cannot be replaced without a great deal of expensive and time-consuming effort. If the surface water is controlled, forest soil remains in place, providing a good foundation for future forest growth.

Forest road & trail best management practices

Use existing roads.

Forest owners usually know where existing roadways lie. These roads often provide the best access through a forest. If so, inspect the grade and slope of the road so that they move small amounts of water short distances. Technicians from the county Soil and Water Conservation District office can help you with technical information and on-site assistance. If an existing road is unsuitable for use (poorly constructed, wrong location), make sure the road is stabilized and will not create a future erosion hazard.

Plan routes for new roads.

New forest roads should be built in as few places as possible. Minimize the length and width of the road to fit the project. Technicians from the county Soil and Water Conservation District office can help you with technical information about forest road construction and on-site assistance.

New roads should follow gentle slopes. Avoid long, straight slopes.

Water on these kinds of roads can gather lots of erosion momentum. Also avoid streams, wetlands, steep areas, and ponds with new roads. If the road has to run close to a stream or other surface water, plan on maintaining a filter strip, 10 - 40 feet wide. This filter strip will capture sediment before it runs into the water.



Diversion ditches / Turnouts / Turn ups

Smaller forest roads and skid trails can be stabilized by redirecting water toward a vegetated area, rather than down the track of a forest road. With a combination of easily-installed ditches, turnouts, and turn-ups, a forest road controls water flow and prevents erosion. In a sense, the forest roadway appears to "wiggle" through the woods, shedding water at each small slope and turn.

Small-scale erosion control features, like rubber deflectors and diversion dips can be constructed by hand.

Where vehicular access could pose a problem for the landowner or forest, place a gate or other barrier at the entrance to the road. Make sure the barrier cannot be avoided by driving around or entering from another point.

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