

Section 7: Skid Trails and Logging Decks

Skid trails and decks should be managed to prevent, control and maintain adequate runoff control.

Remember:

Control runoff and erosion.....

Slow it down and spread it out.

FPG

There are several FPGs, buffer rules, wetland rules, guidance and information documents that specify how and where you may (or may not) build skid trails or decks.

RULE

- Read and understand the rules that may apply to your site. Seek assistance if you are unsure.
- Refer to the *North Carolina Forestry Best Management Practices Manual To Protect Water Quality* for detailed recommendations and further rules descriptions.

Timesaver Tip:

When making a return pass with the skidder back to the woods, routinely drop and pack down leftover logging debris such as laps, limbs or slash atop the skid trail and deck. Leftover debris can cushion the soil from repeated equipment traffic and help control runoff and erosion. For this technique to work well, you should begin immediately from the start of the logging work. Don't wait until the end.

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- Keep out of the SMZ unless unavoidable.
- Orient skid trails and decks in a way that avoids the need for stream crossings.
- If a crossing is needed, minimize the amount of soil disturbance at the crossing and remove the crossing promptly when finished with it.
- Minimize the number, size and area of skid trails and logging decks.
- Keep skid trail coverage under 10% of the total harvest area.
- Keep skid trails to less than 25% grade over long, continuous distances.
- Limit the amount of heavy equipment use within ephemeral drainages.
- Lay out skid trails along the contour of the slope, instead of aligning trails up and down the slope.
- Establish a break in the grade along the skid trails. Switchbacks (a zig-zag pattern) are useful methods.
- Maintain and service equipment to avoid fluid leaks or spills. Secure and store fuel, oil and other fluids away from streams.

- Rehabilitate and stabilize critical bare soil areas as soon as possible. Pay attention to stream crossings, steep slopes and unstable soils.
 - On lowland or swampy sites, consider using “mat logging” or “shovel logging” techniques.
- ❌ *Never use a stream channel for a skid trail.***
- ❌ *Avoid skidding within the natural drainageway of a dry hollow.***



The curve in this skid trail creates a break in the grade, making it easier to control runoff. Laying down slash or laps would help protect the large areas of bare soil.

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Leftover limbs and slash are being carried back to the skid trail from the deck to be placed onto the skid trail. For this practice to work effectively:

- Routinely carry and pack down slash from the beginning of your job. Do not wait until the end of your work, or until a soft spot develops on the skid trail.
- Pack debris atop the approaches to stream crossings to control runoff and erosion.
- On thinning jobs like this photo, laying down slash and limbs also helps to protect the tree roots of the residual leave-trees.



Skid trail has logging debris packed down atop the soil surface. Bridgemats are used for the stream crossing.



Ruts will funnel runoff into the stream. Erosion control structures and stabilization are needed. It appears that the skidding went directly through the stream and no SMZ was established. Water quality will be impacted.

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Skid trail leading down to a stream crossing is packed with logging debris. Skid trail width is minimized. SMZ is intact.



A bare-soil skid trail leads downhill to a stream crossing. Bridgemats have a gap between panels, allowing debris to get into the stream. This gap should be closed. Slash or erosion control structures can help control runoff.



Brush is packed down on this skid trail to control runoff.



Rutted and unstable soil on a skid trail leading toward the stream. Also, no SMZ was left along the stream (arrow).

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BEFORE: Skid trails are closed out with waterbars. Rehab work includes seed and mulch.



AFTER: Green-up of grasses helps to stabilize the soils. Waterbars remain intact and appear to be functioning.



Skid trail is closed-out and stabilized



Don't let this happen to you!

This rutted and sloppy skid trail can easily lead to water quality problems and require substantial rehab work that will cost you a lot of time and money!

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Decks on flat ground allow better control of runoff. Wooden road mats and crushed stone on this deck should help keep mud from being dragged onto the highway.



Logging deck is stabilized with groundcover vegetation.