

The Curious Case of Forest Roads and Managing for Their Water Quality Impacts

George Ice, Ph.D.
24554 Alpine Road
Monroe, OR 97456
Telephone: 541-231-6627
Fax: 541-752-8806
GIce@ncasi.org

Forest roads represent part of the essential infrastructure for modern forest management. Their management has evolved to respond to identified water quality problems. Contemporary forest-road designs focus on moving water rapidly off the road prism and dispersing it back onto the forest floor to allow for settling of sediment. Extensive research has demonstrated improved water quality from forest management in general and for management of forest roads in particular. Contrary to some arguments, nonpoint source control programs for forest management have proven to be very successful, with effective best management practices (BMPs) and high BMP implementation rates. EPA's nationwide data show that the rank of forest management (silviculture) as a source of impaired waterbodies has dropped from sixth to eleventh since the 2002 Report to Congress, and it contributes to just 3% of impaired waterbody miles. Even these values are affected by unachievable water quality standards and extreme skewing of data from reporting by the state of California. Despite this evolution of management practices for forest roads and their low contribution to impaired waterbodies, there is a long history of legislative, regulatory, and judicial activities. This includes recent changes to EPA regulations and a pending US Supreme Court case.