

# 3.3 AESTHETICS OF SKID TRAILS, TRUCK ROADS AND LANDINGS

## BACKGROUND

**Skid trails, permanent truck roads, and log landings create visually dramatic and permanent changes in a woodlot.**

Without skid trails, truck roads, and landings, most management wouldn't be possible. Besides facilitating timber harvests, they can enhance landowner woodlot access, improve wildlife habitat, and provide a means for recreation and fire and pest control. They also can be the greatest expense of a timber harvest. Careful planning reduces costs and minimizes negative aesthetic impact. When built and used during the dry season, they hold up better, look neater, erode less, and are less expensive to construct and use. On some sites, using roads, trails, and landings on frozen ground may be preferable, especially for temporary winter use. Cutting and removing trees on the road right-of-way in advance of bulldozing results in better looking roads.

Landings are cleared areas where timber is brought from the woods, sorted, and stored until it is trucked to a market. Many times landings are located beside a public road. People often judge the quality of a timber harvest by the appearance of the landings, both during and after the harvest, without ever stepping into the woods. A clean, properly sized, well-organized landing will help improve productivity, provide a safer work environment, reduce cleanup costs, and draw positive attention from the public.

Economics and terrain may determine the location of skid trails, roads, and landings, but pre-planning, use of best management practices (BMPs), and good close-out techniques will minimize aesthetic impacts.

## OBJECTIVE

**Plan, construct, use, and maintain skid trails, truck roads, and landings to minimize their visual impact.**

## CONSIDERATIONS

- The State or municipality may hold landowners, loggers, or foresters responsible for damage to public roads.
- Frequency of access, amount of anticipated traffic, seasons during which access is required, and safety concerns affect the number, type and layout of roads and landings.
- Building roads and landings to accommodate visual-quality concerns, or using existing roads that require traveling greater distances, may involve increased costs or may impact ecologically sensitive areas.
- Traffic during wet periods can increase maintenance needs and create unsightly ruts.
- Roads provide access for undesirable activities such as dumping or unwanted traffic that could damage roads and have negative aesthetic impacts.
- A well-maintained road improves recreational uses, provides fire-protection access, and supports other forest management activities. It may also save money.

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- The portion of a timber sale where neatness and organization are the most noticeable is the landing.
- The volume of timber harvested, the need to sort logs by species and products, and the equipment type and size often determine landing size.
- Topography, the location of timber, and the proximity of the harvest to public roads or high-use areas can affect the placement, size and number of landings.
- After the harvest, landings can be used for parking, camping, wildlife openings or future harvest operations. Their placement and size may depend on planned subsequent uses, including preventing unwanted use.
- Landing cleanup and seeding practices will increase costs.
- Leaving landings in their natural state, including leaving woody debris unburied, may benefit wildlife. Logging debris left on landings must comply with the slash law, RSA 227-J:10.

## RECOMMENDED PRACTICES

### Design and Planning

- ✓ Follow state laws and file all necessary highway permits.
- ✓ Follow BMPs. Refer to *Best Management Practices for Erosion Control on Timber Harvesting Operations in New Hampshire* by the N.H. Dept. of Resources and Economic Development, Division of Forests and Lands. Consult the latest version before harvesting timber.
- ✓ Consult the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) or your UNH Cooperative Extension county forester for help and to learn of the availability of federal financial assistance.
- ✓ Designate “bumper trees” along skid trails to minimize damage to residual trees. Leave them after harvesting for future protection and as future cavity trees.
- ✓ Minimize the number of access roads approaching public roads. Creating curves in access roads as they approach public roads makes them less obvious.
- ✓ Plan landings to access future timber sales, keeping their number to a minimum, and sizing them to accommodate products and equipment needs. Locate landings where invasive plants aren’t growing, or remove them before construction.
- ✓ Avoid placing landings within view of public roads, trails, or recreation and residential areas. Consider a short, curved road to landings.
- ✓ In sensitive areas, leave an uncut or partially cut buffer of 150 feet or more between landings and major roads, recreational trails, rivers, and residential areas.
- ✓ Identify disposal areas for blocks and other debris in advance. Push unmerchantable debris into those areas over the course of the job. Blocks, stumps and other woody debris from on-site logging buried on-site are exempt from N.H. Dept. of Environmental Services permitting requirements for stump dumps.

### Construction and Use

- ✓ When constructing a new road, if stumps can’t be trucked or buried, push them off the road and leave in an upright position. Stumps left in this manner look more natural. Hardwood stumps often sprout, further softening their look.
- ✓ Use merchantable timber within trails, roads and landings, and dispose of slash without filling vernal pools or cultural features such as old cellar holes.

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- ✓ When upgrading existing roads, clear trees and brush along roads for only the minimum essential width needed for basic construction, maintenance, and traffic needs. Limit the number and length of truck roads.
- ✓ Avoid tracking mud from truck roads and landings onto public roads by using clean fill, wood chips, or mats. Sweep mud from paved roads.
- ✓ Shape and seed ditches and exposed areas to avoid erosion and improve visual impact. Place waterbars as recommended in the BMPs.

#### When using on-site gravel (borrow) pits

- ✓ Follow state and local regulations pertaining to gravel operations.
- ✓ Avoid locating pits where non-native invasive plants are growing, or remove them before using the pit to avoid moving them with the fill.
- ✓ Locate borrow pits out of the visible corridor as much as possible, or screen them using existing vegetation. Avoid facing them directly toward the road.
- ✓ Before “putting the pit to bed,” consider stockpiling gravel for future use.
- ✓ Rehabilitate pits on completion of use as per RSA 155-E.

#### During the Harvest

- ✓ Organize landings to accommodate sorting, processing, and short-term storage and to allow safe movement of workers and equipment.
- ✓ Minimize the amount of wood waste on the landings through good utilization of the harvested trees and by cutting and leaving unmerchantable sections in the woods or hauling unused blocks back to the woods.
- ✓ Remove slash from landings as soon as possible.
- ✓ Avoid creating landings that evolve into one continuous zone along public roads.
- ✓ Limit the number of skid trails entering and leaving the landing to minimize the amount of disturbance.
- ✓ Properly dispose all trash, motor oil, and other refuse daily.

#### After the Harvest

- ✓ Clear landings of woody debris by burying, piling, or moving it into the woods. Level and smooth the ground. Plant with recommended seed mix only if necessary to stabilize the soil, for wildlife, or for appearance. Otherwise, let natural vegetation establish itself. Contact NRCS for information on site-specific seeding recommendations.
- ✓ Regularly inspect roads and trails. Maintain roads on a schedule to include mowing, cleaning ditches and culverts, repairing washouts, and other activities as needed. Periodic mowing may be necessary to keep the landing open for wildlife and other future use.
- ✓ Install a gate or block access with boulders or other obstacles to keep unwanted vehicles off roads. Post signs that help send a positive stewardship message, yet restrict harmful uses.



### 3.3: Aesthetics of Skid Trails, Truck Roads and Landings

## CROSS REFERENCES

2.2 Forest Structure; 3.1 Timber Harvesting Systems; 3.2 Logging Aesthetics; 3.4 Harvesting in High-Use Recreation Areas; 3.5 Soil Productivity; 4.1 Water Quality; 4.2 Wetlands; 4.3 Forest Management in Riparian Areas; 4.4 Stream Crossings and Habitat; 5.2 Invasive Plants; 5.4 Logging Damage; 6.2 Cavity Trees, Dens and Snag; 6.3 Dead and Down Woody Material; 6.5 Permanent Openings.

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Carbee, H., and S. Smith. 2006. *Forest Products Road Manual: A Handbook for Municipal Officials and Forest Products Industry*. UNH Cooperative Extension, Durham, N.H. 15 p.

Jones, G. T. 1993. *A Guide to Logging Aesthetics: Practical Tips for Loggers, Foresters, and Landowners*. Natural Resource, Agriculture, and Engineering Service. NRAES-60. NRAES Cooperative Extension, Ithaca, N.Y. 28 p.

N.H. Dept. of Resources and Economic Development, Division of Forests and Lands. 2004. *Best Management Practices for Erosion Control on Timber Harvesting Operations in New Hampshire*. State of New Hampshire. [http://extension.unh.edu/resources/files/Resource000247\\_Rep266.pdf](http://extension.unh.edu/resources/files/Resource000247_Rep266.pdf) Accessed March 13, 2010.

RSA 155-E. *Local Regulation Excavations*.

<http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/rsa/html/NHTOC/NHTOC-XII-155-E.htm> Accessed May 27, 2010.

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