Forest Roads

Forest roads are an integral part of any forest management operation providing access for anything from stand inspections for insects and disease to recreational opportunities. Before actually constructing the road you must first decide on its intended use and life span. Some roads are built to be used for the life of the tract while others are built for short term use such as during harvest operations. No matter whether you are building a permanent, heavy use road or just a onetime use road, BMPs need to be implemented on both. Because of the nature of roads being bare soil areas, extra care must be taken to ensure that erosion does not occur impeding access as well as increasing the chances of sediment entering nearby waterways. Over 90% of all erosion that occurs on silvicultural operations originates on road systems, thus demonstrating the importance of protecting these areas by using BMPs. It can be as simple as revegetating a road with grass or as complex as putting down rock with a geotextile fabric.

BMP Guidelines for Forest Roads

- Use soil surveys, topographical maps, and/or aerial photographs to help determine the best location.

- Avoid constructing roads on steep slopes and, when practical, they should follow the contour of the land.

- Avoid constructing roads in Streamside Management Zones, wet areas, and other sensitive areas.

- Balance cut and fill areas.

- Minimize the number of stream crossings.

- Minimize the size and length of the road.

- Water control structures such as waterbars and wing ditches should be used to divert water off the road (waterbars are better suited for temporary roads or roads with light traffic levels).

- High traffic roads should be crowned and ditched.

- Cut trees along the sides of the road where sunlight is necessary to ensure drying of the road.

- Stabilize and retire roads that are no longer in use.

- Roads should be inspected periodically for problems.

More information regarding BMPs for forest roads can be found in the BMP Handbook. For a copy of the BMP Handbook please visit http://texasforestservice.tam.edu/BMP or your local Texas Forest Service office.