

Camp Roads: Highways for Pollution, In Our Back Yard

Most folks who live on gravel roads, where they have to do their own maintenance, think about the cost of filling in pot holes and washouts. They think about the cost of new sand or gravel to fix the road but not where the old sand and gravel went. Some believe that the soil collects in the ditches. But once in a ditch, it is straight onto the nearest water: a lake, stream, river, or bay. In fact gravel roads and associated ditches are the largest source of pollution to many Maine lakes. Just think of the miles of camp roads (and ditches) that surround our lakes.

In statewide phone surveys, many people did not consider soil a serious pollutant. It is natural, so how can it be bad?

Every year, rainstorms and snowmelt wash away tons of gravel, sand, and soil. We have all seen a stream in our neighborhood turn cloudy or brown after a rainstorm. This cloudy water makes it difficult for fish to see and feed properly. The particles act as sandpaper against a fish's gills causing damage and making breathing difficult.

Many fish and aquatic insects lay their eggs in gravel beds. The sediments that are deposited in the stream cover up these areas, sometimes even entombing young fish and eggs.

To add to all these problems, eroded soil particles are more than just soil particles. They carry hitchhiking pollutants such as nutrients, oil, fertilizers, pesticides and bacteria.

To protect local water quality, a roadway needs to be designed and maintained to shed water from its surface into nearby wooded areas, not to the lake. Properly crowning the road or installing diversions will direct water away from the road surface. Road ditches and culvert crossings also need to be properly stabilized to prevent soil erosion. Finally dust control on the road surface is essential during the dry summer months to prevent soil particles from being transported into nearby water.

These practices will also reduce the amount of money that will need to be spent each year to maintain the road because there will be less erosion. They will make a smoother travel surface, too. The same practices will benefit our waters, our pocketbooks, and our car alignments.

To reduce soil erosion and pollution from unpaved roads, the DEP has a number of resources: manuals on how to form a camp road association and how to maintain a camp road; and training programs for contractors, landscapers, and road associations.

For more information about camp road maintenance visit:

<http://www.maine.gov/dep/land/watershed/camp/road/>

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