

Vegetation

Plants and grasses do an excellent job of minimizing erosion, slowing flow velocities, and filtering out pollutants from runoff. Guidelines for vegetation in ditches include:

- Disturb vegetation as little as possible.
- Seed, sod, mulch, and/or place fiber mats immediately. Don't let erosion get started.
- Fertilize, if needed, to speed growth, but do it sparingly. Too much fertilizer can negatively affect the quality of both runoff and infiltration water.
- Mow to control weeds and woody vegetation, but leave vegetation six inches or longer so plants stay healthy and control water velocity and erosion more effectively.

Road rehabilitation and reconstruction are expensive. Don't let poor drainage undermine your investment. Be sure to include drainage improvements as part of roadway upgrade projects and schedule routine repairs every five years.

Parts of this article are adapted from information that originally appeared in the winter 2000 issue of the New Hampshire LTAP center newsletter. The WisDOT Product Acceptability List is on the Web at: <http://www.dot.wisconsin.gov/business/engrserv/pal.htm>.

Details of DNR stormwater rules and descriptive fact sheets are on the Web at: <http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/water/wm/nps/admrules.html>.

Copies of the erosion control matrix and the Drainage Manual are available from T.I.C. See page 8.

Ditching regulated in wetlands

Wetlands have special protections because of their environmental benefits. Local road agencies should be familiar with areas where wetlands border their roads before they start ditching operations.

"They should contact the DNR if they suspect they will be working in a wetland area," says Dan Houston, DNR Water Regulation and Zoning Specialist based in Park Falls.

"Ditching wetlands along roadsides is one of the activities we deal with. Maintaining the existing ditch contours is generally not regulated, as long as spoils are not side-cast into the wetland. Mechanized land clearing, grading, or side-casting in wetlands for new or enlarged ditches is regulated."

You can't always tell by looking whether an area is wetland. They are defined by having specific types of wet soils and water-loving plants. However wetland areas are shown on special wetland maps which can be reviewed at the county zoning, Land Conservation Department, or local DNR office.

If it looks like there are wetlands near your planned project or if you find a lot of dark organic matter in the soil, contact the DNR. A trained person can verify the wetlands and assess whether a permit is needed. Permit turnaround can be quite fast



Side-casting ditch spoils into wetlands, as shown in these photos, is regulated by DNR.

during the growing season, Houston says, but they can't make the determination when the ground is frozen or snow-covered.

Furthermore, ditching in a wetland may not help protect your road. "Once you get to the wetland level you're generally at the water table," says Houston. "The best thing to do is leave the wetland soils and wetland vegetation intact. They act as a sponge and a filter to improve the water quality as it runs off."

So, check before you ditch. If you don't, you may face enforcement action.

To obtain copies of wetland maps for your locality contact Lois Simon, DNR, P.O. Box 7921, Madison, WI 53707-7921. lois.simon@dnr.state.wi.us Wetland maps are at a scale of 1" = 2000' or 1:24,000, detailed enough to show where a town road crosses through a wetland.

Details of DNR waterway and wetland rules and descriptive fact sheets are on the Web at: <http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/water/fhp/waterfront.htm> for how to contact us.

Silt fence fails in channels

In the last issue of *Crossroads*, this photo appeared with an article on preventing soil erosion, incorrectly implying that it was an appropriate use of silt fence. We were wrong.

"WisDOT does not allow silt fence across a channel, regardless of slope," says Gil Layton Erosion Control Storm Water Specialist, WisDOT District 4. "The reason is that silt fence is not made to be a ditch check. It fails because it can't withstand any heavy load of sediment against it." What you should be using are erosion bales or WisDOT-approved, manufactured temporary ditch checks.

The restriction is included in the new TRANS 401 and DNR 151 erosion control rules which are now in effect.

For a list of approved erosion control products check the WisDOT Product Acceptability List (PAL) on the Web at: <http://www.dot.wisconsin.gov/business/engrserv/pal.htm>

