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Stabilizing Forest Roads to Help Restore Fish Habitats: A Northwest Washington Example

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ABSTRACT

As part of total watershed rehabilitation to improve fish habitats and water quality and to reduce flood hazards, 30-40-year-old, unused, largely impassable roads and landings in the Canyon Creek watershed within the North Fork Nooksack River watershed were decommissioned by stabilizing fills, removing stream crossings, recontouring slopes, and reestablishing drainage patterns to reduce the landslide hazards. The average cost for decommissioning a road was \$3,500 per kilometer (for earthmoving by excavator and bulldozer) where considerable amounts of alder brush were cleared and sidecast material was pulled back upslope. Lower costs were associated with lesser earthmoving jobs; the highest costs resulted when fills at stream crossings or landings had to be removed. In contrast to unused roads not treated, decommissioned roads and landings were largely undamaged by rain-on-snow runoff that produced a 50-year flood in the North Fork Nooksack River in November 1989 and sustained little damage during rain-on-snow runoff in November 1990 that severely damaged main haul roads in northwest Washington.