Friends of the Winooski River   May 2017 Newsletter

Water Quality Impacts of Dirt Roads

Vermont is a hilly state crisscrossed by nearly 19,000 miles of roads. Many of those roads make their way through the valleys and mountains alike by following the routes that streams have created. While this may the path of least resistance for roads, it also makes them a source of sediment and a host of other pollutants that damage our streams and lakes. Dirt roads, in particular, are often located on steeper grades in narrow valleys right next to streams.   This makes them vulnerable to erosion and a major source of pollution.

In addition to damaging water quality and habitat, fixing erosion is an ongoing maintenance issue and expense for towns. But this is not just an issue for towns. Of the nearly, 19,000 miles of roads in Vermont, 15% or over 2800 miles are private roads. This number does not include what is likely hundreds more miles of driveways.

The EPA estimates that unpaved roads alone account for 5.6% of phosphorus flowing into Lake Champlain. According to a University of Vermont study, that number is even higher for the Winooski watershed where dirt roads are the source of 11% or over 33,000 pounds of phosphorus. In addition to phosphorus, dirt roads in the Winooski watershed are the source of over 40,000 metric tons of sediment or 31% of the annual average Winooski river suspended sediment load.

Fortunately, the solutions that can protect waterways can also save money in the long term. The key to protecting your road and the nearby stream is to divert water off the road into vegetated areas where it can slow down and soak in. You can learn more about how to inspect your road or driveway to determine fixes by reading Preventing Driveway Erosion. Some of the fixes are simpler than you realize!

You can also attend our Private Road and Driveway Workshop on June 19th in Marshfield. You can find the details here.