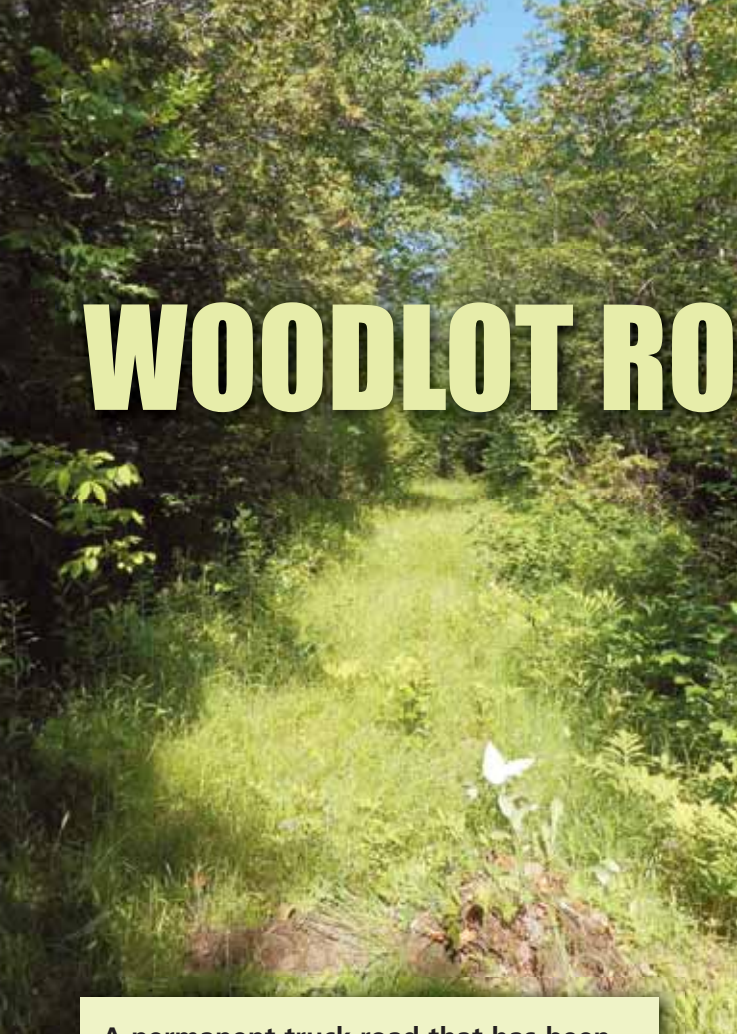


# WOODLOT ROADS & TRAILS



**A permanent truck road that has been graveled, properly drained and seeded, and provides access for logging, hunting, snowmobiling, ATVs and equestrians. Maintenance has been by farm tractors using 3-point-hitch grader blades to maintain drainage, and sickle-bar and rotary mowers to control vegetation.**

**O**n the woodlot, the difference between roads and trails may not be clear—I have heard the terms “skid road” and “truck trail.” So, what’s the difference? A skid road may be a high-grade, heavily used trail for dragging wood to the landing, whereas a truck trail may be a low-grade truck access from the highway to the landing. For purposes of discussion, we’ll consider a road as a pathway for highway vehicles and a trail as a path for off-road vehicles such as tractors, skidders, and forwarders.

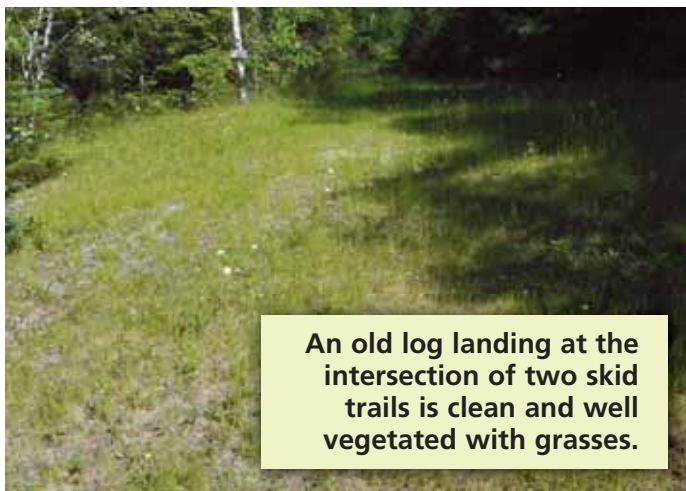
Most woodlots have a system of logging roads and trails from times past. As logging with crawler tractors and horses made it possible to navigate steep terrain in ways that skidders and forwarders cannot, not all old trails are useable. Since skidding capacity was limited, and trucking could handle large loads at much lower cost, truck roads often pushed into the woods as far as possible. In southern pine lands, trucks often drove to the stump, while in northern climes, roads were often

built on frozen ground, sometimes across wetlands, and are of no use.

1950s logging used 2- or 3-axle trucks (WWII surplus army trucks were quite popular) that could negotiate fairly tough going and sharp turns. But times have changed, the variety of forest products has decreased (thanks to plastic), the number and variety of mills has decreased, and haul distances are much longer. That means longer hauls with larger loads using modern 4-axle and trailer rigs that cannot navigate these old roads. Couple that with cultural changes—more leisure time, and more interest in forest recreation. Forest roads and trails are now multiple use—walking, hunting, horseback riding, ATVs, snowmobiles, skis, just enjoying nature.

So nowadays, forest roads and trails need to be planned and built to serve more than just harvesting timber. And the habit of leaving debris at log landings is verboten. Landings and trails can be seeded with herbaceous vegetation that serves the dual purpose of erosion control and wildlife food. In effect, today’s roads and trails need to be planned for permanent use, not just for the current operation.

Landings are the interface between off-road wood movement, skidding or forwarding, and highway transport. With more efficient off-road movement and limited maneuverability of highway rigs, landings will be near the highway, thus eliminating the problem of building truck roads. After logging is over, the landing can be a parking place for recreationists as well as a



**An old log landing at the intersection of two skid trails is clean and well vegetated with grasses.**

A short skidder trail was maintained to provide access to this streamside site for picnicking and camping.



food source for wildlife.

The trail system itself should be designed for efficient skidding or forwarding with emphasis on proper drainage to minimize erosion. Also consider aesthetics—there may be a nice hillside view that could use a cleared vista, or a streamside site for picnics. ■

*Ben Hoffman is a forester with 28 years experience in state, federal, and private forestry and 17 years in academia. Ben is retired as a Maine Licensed Forester, and Vermont Land Surveyor.*

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