

road removal

safe removal of unused roads

There are thousands of abandoned roads. In the logging boom of the 1950s and '60s, before modern day laws, timber operators often left roads and stream crossings in place after they were done harvesting. The Mattole watershed contains hundreds of these abandoned roads.

Unmaintained roads erode. When failed culverts and crossings clog and blow out, releasing large quantities of sediment into creeks or rivers, the roads they were on can become harmful to the areas around them and even dangerous. Unmaintained roads can concentrate storm runoff, causing severe erosion, gullying, and even landslides.

Roads can be abandoned responsibly. Removal of stream crossings and leaving out-sloped road segments in-between allows for safe reopening of the road at a later date. This is often done by timber companies and should be considered before complete removal is approached. If you would like to abandon a road but don't expect to reopen it, you have the choice to give post-decommissioning care. This includes not only removing stream crossings but also involves mulching and tree planting.

Roads that may fail should be removed. Road removal is advised when a road is no longer being used at all and will not be used in the future. It is also advised to remove a road that has been abandoned and is contributing (or has the potential to contribute) to sediment in a nearby watercourse. Timely removal of these unused roads, or at least the streams that cross them, helps to protect fisheries and heal the landscape. However, make a conscious effort to evaluate and limit the amount of sediment that will be contributed to the waterways by the actual road removal.

Get help. In road removal projects, the slope is often recontoured to leave a foot trail, stream crossings and culverts are removed, and exposed slopes are planted with mulch and trees. These projects are best done by an experienced professional. The MRC is available for technical and financial advice regarding your



BEFORE REMOVING A ROAD, consider safety (how hazardous it is) and decide how much of it will be removed. Look at the amount of sediment it is already contributing, if any, and determine whether the projected possible sedimentation will increase or decrease with the road removal. Be aware of this general cost-to-benefit ratio: removing a road can cost anywhere between \$5,000 and \$50,000 per mile, depending on the scale of treatment needed. Finally, contact MRC for information on regulatory constraints.

project. The MRC also has a road work program, *Good Roads, Clear Creeks*, that may be of service to you. Please contact us to find out.

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