



USDA Forest Service Update

September 2013

Subject: Wildlife Entrapment from Erosion Control Material

Issue: Wildlife mortality and entrapment from plastic netting used in Erosion Control Matting (ECM) products has been found to entangle wildlife, including reptiles, amphibians, birds, and small mammals.

Key Points:

- A variety of manufactured ECM products may be used during construction projects to temporarily protect soil from erosion and facilitate establishment of vegetation (“erosion control”), or to trap eroded sediment and retain it onsite (“sediment control”). However, the environmental protection provided by certain erosion control products may have unintended consequences.
- Several of these products commonly contain plastic netting or mesh and have been found to entangle wildlife, including reptiles, amphibians, birds, and small mammals and the mortality of entangled individuals has been documented.
- Temporary erosion and sediment control products are designed to degrade after a period of time. However, several temporary erosion and sediment control products are commonly left in place permanently, particularly when used with seeding because the new vegetation grows up through the netting.
- When plastic netting does degrade, plastic fragments may be blown or washed into waterways creating additional hazards to wildlife.
- Acceptable, cost effective biodegradable products exist that may fulfill erosion control functions and do not persist in the environment and certain management practices can reduce the need for non-biodegradable products.
- Vermont, Washington and Ontario, Canada have cautioned, curtailed or prohibited the use of non-biodegradable ECM due to risk and mortality to species including amphibians and reptiles, birds, other small mammals.
- Additional knowledge is needed on species risk, entanglement/entrapment, and mortality on National Forest System and other public lands to inform decision makers on the scope and severity of the issue and applicable alternatives.

Background:

Erosion Control Matting, also known as mulch control netting, erosion control blanket, landscape mesh or netting, is routinely used to stabilize seed and soil in road, stream, or sod projects. However, some ECM products contain a plastic monofilament mesh (same material as fishing line) and pose risks to several wildlife species. Nylon mesh netting of 1” square or more is often embedded in erosion control materials and has been exhibited to entangle wildlife, including mammals, birds, fish, reptiles, and amphibians. It is believed that snakes suffer the highest rate of mortality as a result of entanglement with ECM containing monofilament mesh as snakes are unable to move backwards.

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