

# Blowing Smoke and Throwing Seeds: A Road Ripper's Guide to Spotting Pathetic Revegetation Plans

— by Mark VanderMeer, from *The Road-RIPorter* 3.3

Road obliteration is more than pushing dirt into a semblance of the original terrain and camouflaging the scar with grass.

It *should* mean restoring the structure and function of all natural processes, especially hydrologic functions, and establishing a plant community. In my experience, the revegetation element of a road obliteration project often suffers inconceivable neglect. This short guide should help you uncover inept plans before they have a chance to be implemented.

When critiquing the revegetation portion of a road obliteration proposal, five main concerns can be examined to determine if the proposal is competent.

## Number One

The qualifications of the planner. A qualified planner will be more likely to submit a competent and workable plan. Is the planner experienced in ecological restoration? Does the planner have any background in disturbance ecology? How long has the planner been working in the area? Do you trust them to do the job correctly?

## Number Two

The percent of the total budget allotted towards revegetation. Between 15% and 25% is reasonable. As a rough guide, this will give you an idea of how important revegetation is to the planners. Often the revegetation budget is overlooked and too much of the money goes towards machinery costs. Reject any proposal that asks for volunteers.

## Number Three

A solid goal statement. Does such a statement exist within the document? If not, there is a problem. What is the goal? Erosion control? Weed control? Aesthetics? Camouflage? Wildlife forage? Ecological restoration? Will the plan meet the goal?

## Number Four

An analysis of soil characteristics. Does such an analysis exist within the plan? Does it address soil texture? Substrate stability? Water holding capacity? Available nutrients? Topographic and micro-topographic influences? Is there any mention of soil/plant relationships? There should be.

## Number Five

Planting concerns. Every restoration project proposal should have a description of the existing native plant community. Will native plant species be used for revegetation? How were the species selected? Will a diversity of plants be used? For example, does the seed mix include grasses, legumes, herbs, and woody plant seeds? The more species, and the greater the diversity between plant types, the better the plan. Where did the seeds or seedlings come from? Do the proposed plantings match the species in the surrounding natural plant community? Will a variety of revegetation techniques be employed? For example, will seedlings be

planted or will seed traps be constructed? Often a blanket approach to revegetation can be a sign of laziness or incompetence.

## Conclusion

A good revegetation effort is the binder that holds a road obliteration project together. Without it, a project will often end in failure. A good plan will prevent the use of exotic species, control weeds, thwart erosion and mass wasting, and promote a complex plant community that will eventually truly obliterate all traces of the road.

Try to be kind to our brothers and sisters in the planning office. Give 'em hell when they need it, but back it up with constructive and

realistic suggestions. If chastised appropriately, you may find agency planners knocking on the door for *your* advice.

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