Over the past few years, there have been some powerful summer storms. The accompanying heavy rains can make for real “gully washers” in streams, ditches, and camp roads all around the lake. A common occurrence on unpaved access roads is the scouring and washing off of the road surface into the adjoining landscape. Eventually, gully formation makes the road nearly impassable by vehicles and equipment. To address this matter, staff of the Skaneateles Lake Watershed Agricultural Program (SLWAP) have been installing water deflectors in unpaved access roads to divert water off the road and prevent erosion.

What is a Water Deflector?

A water deflector is quickly and simply constructed from a length of standard-grade rubber (made from a used conveyor belt) that is sandwiched between two treated, wooden 2” x 6” planks. Multiple, 4-inch galvanized screws help to secure the rubber belt between the planks.

Benefits of Water Deflectors

- Helps to divert water off access roads
- Reduces erosion and formation of gullies
- Allows vehicles and equipment to pass over without interference
- Suitable on unpaved, low maintenance, gravel or earthen roads (such as farm access roads, camp roads, forest roads, or other seasonal use roads)

Supplies Needed

- 2” x 6” treated lumber planks (Two planks per deflector)
- 3/8” thick by 11” wide standard grade rubber (length needed is determined by width of road) (used conveyor belt rubber is suitable – most earthwork contractors have connections with local quarries and can help you locate a source of rubber)
- 4-inch galvanized screws
- 4-6” limestone rip rap
- Seed & mulch (for disturbed area after construction)

Typical material costs of a deflector are between $50 and $100, assuming you have a used rubber conveyor belt. The actual cost is dependent on the length and number of deflectors needed. Installation costs are extra, but can be easily accomplished with a small excavator or rubber-tired backhoe.

The water deflector is installed into an excavated trench in the access road so that a minimum of three inches of the rubber belt is exposed above the road surface. (Note: Deflectors are typically installed on seasonal roads. Extra care must be taken if activities such snowplowing or road grading will occur that could damage the exposed rubber.) The deflector must be installed at a 30-degree down-slope angle to the road in order to ensure that water flows off the road and remains clean.

In terms of maintenance, it is recommended to periodically inspect your water deflectors for damage as well as a buildup of soil behind the deflector. To keep the deflectors working properly, remove any accumulated soil collected against the deflector with a hand shovel every spring and fall.
The staff of the Skaneateles Lake Watershed Agricultural Program (SLWAP) and County Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD) in your area can provide technical assistance on implementing deflectors in access roads.

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LaFayette, NY 13084
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Onondaga County SWCD
Phone: (315) 677-3851

Cortland County SWCD
Phone: (607) 756-5991

Cayuga County SWCD
Phone: (315) 252-4171

Additional Practices to Stabilize Roads
Other practices can also be installed to manage surface water and reduce erosion of roads.
- Water Boxes
- Broad-based Dips
- Box & Pole Culverts

Please contact your local SWCD for technical assistance with these practices.

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