Wildlife Friendly Erosion Control

Wildlife entanglement in, and death from, plastic netting and other man-made plastic materials has been documented in birds (Johnson, 1990; Fuller-Perrine and Tobin, 1993), fish (Johnson, 1990), mammals (Derraik, 2002), and reptiles (Barton and Kinkead, 2005; Kapfer and Paloski, 2011). Yet the use of these materials continues in many cases, without consideration for wildlife impacts. Plastic netting is frequently used for erosion control during construction and landscape projects, and can negatively impact terrestrial and aquatic wildlife populations as well as snag in maintenance machinery resulting in costly repairs and delays. However, wildlife friendly erosion control materials do exist, and are sold by several large erosion control material companies. Below are a few key considerations before starting a project.

Know Your Options

- When erosion control is necessary, select products with biodegradable netting (Natural Fiber, Biodegradable Polyesters, etc.).
- DO NOT use products that require UV-light to biodegrade (also called, "photodegradable"). These do not biodegrade properly when shaded by vegetation.
- Use netting with rectangular shaped mesh (not square mesh).
- Use netting with flexible (non-welded) mesh.
- Wildlife friendly erosion netting costs are often similar to conventional plastic netting.

Know the Landscape

- It is especially important to use wildlife friendly erosion control around:
    - Wetlands, rivers, lakes, and other watercourses.
    - Habitat transition zones (Prairie – Woodland Edges, Rocky Outcrop –Woodland Edges, Steep Rocky Slopes, etc.).
    - Areas with threatened or endangered species.
- Use *plastic* erosion mesh wisely, not all areas with disturbed ground necessitate its use. Do not use *plastic* mesh unless it is absolutely necessary. Other erosion control options exist (open weave textile (OWT), rolled erosion control products (RECPs) with woven natural fiber netting).

Protect Wildlife

- Remember to consult with local natural resource authorities (DNR, USFWS, etc.) before starting a project. They can help you identify sensitive areas and rare species.
- Avoid erosion control materials with plastic netting where possible.
- Use only biodegradable materials, preferably those that biodegrade quickest.

Plains Garter Snake (*Thamnophis radix*) stuck in erosion mesh. Southern Minnesota.

Vole (*Microtus* sp.) found dead in erosion mesh. Southern Minnesota.

Literature Referenced

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