

Feature

Stuck in the mud

Edward Gallia, shoot owner, farmer and independent conservation adviser, provides some tips on how shoots can help prevent soil erosion and pollution.

FARMERS ARE UNDER INCREASED PRESSURE TO take action to reduce risk of run-off and erosion from their land, which pollutes watercourses and causes flooding of houses. Shoots, as land managers, could also come under the same spotlight.

In a shoot situation, some apparently high risk situations are alleviated (eg. growing maize on slopes is less risky as the crop is retained through the winter rather than harvested in a wet autumn). But other pressures apply, usually driven by economics.

The main issues for a shoot can be summarised by: access; game cropping; and vegetative cover (above and below ground). If abused, any of these will lead to a risk of run-off and loss of soil structure. You can minimise the risks through the following:

ACCESS (THE SHOOT MUST GO ON!)

- Avoid travelling on waterlogged soil.
- Reduce vehicle numbers.
- Keep to hard tracks wherever possible.
- Take different routes if one has become problematic.
- Use low ground-pressure tyres.

GAME CROPS

- Try to avoid cultivating steep slopes for game plots.
- If possible, drill across slopes. That way water will be less likely to find an easy route downhill.

Run-off from a field meets a river. Notice the soil deposits about to pollute the watercourse!



Ruts caused by too much traffic during wet weather and now acting as a channel for run-off and a source of erosion.

- Similarly, orientate feed rides across the slope.

VEGETATIVE COVER (OR LACK OF IT)

- Soil that is either bare and/or devoid of roots is far more prone to erosion – there is nothing to protect it from the rain or to hold moving water back.
- Tracks are, by definition, devoid of vegetation and can be a water-highway.
- The key is to reduce the speed of water moving down a track; and then to divert it to a soakaway or other sacrificial area at frequent intervals.

Game cover plots on steep ground are potentially high risk. Could drilling and feed rides go across the slope instead?

