



Removal of Woody Debris and Trash from Rivers and Streams



Woody debris blocking bridge openings should be removed.



Woody debris that does not pose a hazard should be left in place.

Not All Woody Debris is a Problem

Woody debris such as trees, branches and stumps are an important part of natural and healthy stream systems. In the upper reaches of streams, such debris increases channel roughness, dissipates energy to slow floodwaters and reduces potential for flood damage downstream. This material also forms a basis for the entire aquatic ecosystem food chain. Woody debris that poses little risk to infrastructure is best left in place, thereby saving time and money for more critical work at other locations. Hanging trees, natural material wedged into banks, and stabilized woody debris within a stream is most often best left alone.

However, in some instances significant debris can impact flows by blocking bridge and culvert openings, diverting streams and causing bank erosion. When debris poses a risk to infrastructure, such as bridges or homes, it should be removed.

Removal of Problem Woody Debris May Not Require a Permit

Provided fallen trees, limbs, debris and trash can be pulled, cabled or otherwise removed from a stream or stream bank, without significant disruption of the stream bed and banks, a permit from the Department of Environmental Conservation is not required. Equipment may not be operated in the water and any increase in stream turbidity from the removal must be avoided. Consultation with the Department can help determine if, when and how debris should be removed.

Any work that will disturb the bed or banks of a protected stream (gravel removal, stream restoration, bank stabilization, installation / repair / replacements of culverts or bridges, objects embedded in the stream that require digging out , etc.) will require an Article 15 permit from the Department.



General Guidelines for Debris Removal

Woody debris helps stabilize the stream, reduce erosion, and slow down highly erosive storm-induced stream flows. Brush and fallen trees in a creek also provide food, shelter, and other benefits to fish and wildlife. Leave in place any woody debris that does not pose a hazard.

Woody debris and trash can be removed from a stream without the need for an Article 15 permit under the following Guidelines:

- Fallen trees and debris may be pulled from the stream by vehicles and motorized equipment operating from the top of the streambanks using winches, chains and or cables.
- Hand-held tools, such as chainsaws, axes, hand-saws, etc., may be used to cut up the debris into manageable sized pieces.
- Downed trees that are still attached to the banks should be cut off near the stump. Do not grub (pull out) tree stumps from the bank. Stumps hold the bank from eroding.
- All trees, brush, and trash that is removed from the channel should not be left on the floodplain. Trash should be properly disposed of at a waste management facility. Trees and brush can be utilized as firewood. To prevent the spread of invasive species, such as Emerald Ash Borer, firewood cannot be moved more than 50 miles from its point of origin. For information on invasive insects, please see <http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/47761.html>

When is a Permit Required?

Projects that will require disturbance of the stream bed or banks such as excavating sand and gravel, digging embedded debris from the streambed or the use of motorized, vehicular equipment, such as a tractor, backhoe, bulldozer, log skidder, four wheel drive truck, etc. (any heavy equipment), in the stream channel, or anywhere below the top of banks, will require either a Protection of Waters or Excavation or Fill in Navigable Waters Permit.

If you have any questions about when a permit is required, or to discuss permitting requirements, please call the Division of Environmental Permits at the Regional Office for your County listed at <http://www.dec.ny.gov/about/50230.html>