



## Project phasing: Earth Work & Site Prep

### Timing

Earthwork and soil preparation usually happen during the dry season – May or June through September or October, depending on the year. Usually, earthwork is performed by the general contractor with backhoes and front end loaders, whereas soil preparation, is done by the landscape contractor with smaller versions of the same equipment. But it frequently makes sense to combine these traditionally separated activities and have all the soil work done at one time, when the big equipment is on site.

Construction activities usually leave sites in bad shape for plants; soil is compacted, stripped of topsoil, and prone to erosion. But the same equipment that caused this problem can help correct it. While you have graders and other large earthmoving machinery on site, think about what can be done to prepare for planting.

### Decompaction

Construction activities usually leave site soils badly compacted, either as a requirement of construction or as a side effect of numerous passes of heavy equipment. But the grading contractor can efficiently decompact the soil as the machinery leaves the site, possibly mixing in amendments at the same time. The soil should be decompacted at least 12" deep. Once a site has been decompacted, do not allow heavy machinery back on it.

### Habitat Features

It's best to include placement of large stumps and logs used as habitat features in the earthwork phase. It's relatively easily done with a backhoe, while planting crews may not have the capacity or equipment to move large woody debris. And if the planting crew did have big equipment, it would mean driving heavy machinery on the site after the soil preparation is completed.

### Weed Control

Most sites should include a detailed weed control program as the first step of restoration, prior to any planting. All but newly constructed bare earth sites are likely to have *existing* weed problems. On many sites, thorough, effective initial weed control followed with ongoing maintenance may be the most important action for project success. (All projects have weed problems *after* installation, but that's a different matter.) Once again, if earthmoving equipment is already on site, have them implement the first stage of weed control.

©2001 Sound Native Plants. OK to copy and distribute but please acknowledge source.