

# Study: Cleared ski runs recover the best

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What happens to the land when a ski run is abandoned? Not much, if the run was previously graded, according to a study from UC Davis.

The study, published online Wednesday in the Journal of Applied Ecology, evaluated six abandoned ski areas in the Northern Sierra region of California and Nevada. It found that runs that were graded showed no predictable recovery even 40 years after abandonment.

The sites ranged from 10 to 43 years since abandonment and, like many ski areas in the Western United States, most had operated under a special-use permit on U.S. Forest Service lands. The study included the Lake Tahoe area sites of Powder Bowl, Plavada, Tannenbaum, Edelweiss, Iron Mountain and Echo Summit.

With graded runs, heavy machinery is used to remove vegetation, boulders and, consequently, much of the topsoil and seed bank during construction.

In contrast, "cleared" runs, in which trees and shrubs were cut with their roots left in the ground, consistently recovered to blend in with the surrounding forest, the study found. Trees and other vegetation grew back over time, and bare ground and visible soil erosion decreased, protecting water quality.

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