

High-voltage Normally-off Recessed Tri-gate GaN Power MOSFETs with Low On-resistance

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Abstract— In this letter, we present normally-off GaN-on-Si MOSFETs based on the combination of tri-gate with a short barrier recess to yield a large positive threshold voltage (V_{TH}), while maintaining a low specific on resistance ($R_{ON,SP}$) and high current density (I_D). The tri-gate structure offered excellent channel control, enhancing the V_{TH} from +0.3 V for the recessed to +1.4 V for the recessed tri-gate, along with a much reduced hysteresis in V_{TH} , and a significantly increased transconductance (g_m). Additional conduction channels at the sidewalls of the tri-gate trenches compensated the degradation in ON resistance (R_{ON}) from the gate recess, resulting in a small R_{ON} of $7.32 \pm 0.26 \Omega \cdot \text{mm}$ for L_{GD} of 15 μm , and an increase in the maximum output current (I_D^{max}). In addition, the tri-gate inherently integrates a gate-connected field-plate (FP), which improved the breakdown voltage (V_{BR}) and reduced the degradation in dynamic R_{ON} . With proper passivation techniques, these devices could be very promising as high performance power switches for future power applications.

Index Terms— E-mode, normally-off, GaN, MOS HEMT, tri-gate, high breakdown, low leakage, low on-resistance, gate recess.

I. INTRODUCTION

GaN (MOS)HEMTs offer a huge potential for power applications thanks to their low losses and high blocking voltages [1]. Efficient power switches usually require a positive V_{TH} that is sufficiently large, along with low $R_{ON,SP}$ and high V_{BR} [2], which is however very challenging in GaN MOSHEMTs. Among several reported techniques, such as fluorine plasma treatment [3]–[5] and p-GaN gate [6]–[8], recessing the barrier under the gate region [9]–[12], either partially or fully, can lead to large V_{TH} [13], which however typically degrades R_{ON} . While reducing the gate recess length can improve R_{ON} , it also results in a negative shift of V_{TH} [14].

Recently tri-gate structures are attracting considerable attention due to their better gate control [15]–[17] and enhanced V_{BR} [18]–[20] compared to planar devices, without degrading the R_{ON} [17]. In addition, tri-gates allow a controllable positive shift of V_{TH} by changing the fin width, due to the partial relaxation of the AlGaN barrier and the enhanced electrostatic control from the tri-gate sidewalls [15]–[21].

However, reaching positive V_{TH} relying only on tri-gates, requires very small fin widths [21], [22], which demands high

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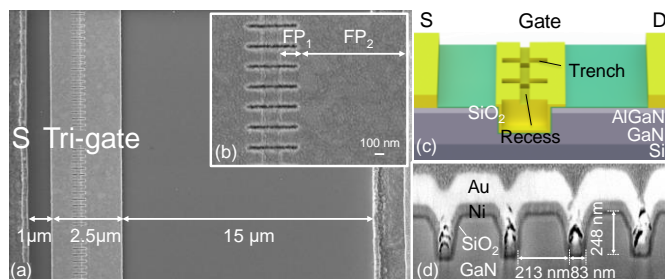


Fig. 1. (a) Top-view and (b) zoomed SEM images of the recessed tri-gate MOSFET. (c) 3D schematic of recessed tri-gate MOSFET. (d) Cross-sectional views of recessed tri-gate MOSFET.

resolution lithography. This requirement can be significantly relieved by combining tri-gates with gate recess, as demonstrated in [19].

In this letter, we demonstrate high-performance normally-off GaN-on-Si MOSFETs based on an optimized recessed tri-gate structure. This structure offered large V_{TH} and low R_{ON} concurrently, thanks to the additional conduction channels at the tri-gate sidewalls. In addition, the tri-gate inherently integrates a gate-connected FP, which improved the V_{BR} and reduced the degradation in dynamic R_{ON} , even without passivation. These results show the enormous potential of recessed tri-gate for high-voltage normally-off GaN transistors.

II. DEVICE DESIGN AND FABRICATION

The AlGaN/GaN epitaxial structure in this work consisted of 4.2 μm buffer, 420 nm un-doped GaN channel, 20 nm $\text{Al}_{0.25}\text{Ga}_{0.75}\text{N}$ barrier and 2.5 nm GaN Cap layers. The schematics and scanning electron microscopy (SEM) images of the device are shown in Fig.1 (a-d). The device fabrication started with the definition of the mesa and tri-gate regions by e-beam lithography, and followed by Cl_2 -based ICP etch. The tri-gate width (w) was varied from 200 nm to 600 nm, and the spacing (s) was fixed at 100 nm. This corresponds to filling factors ($\text{FF} = w/(w+s)$) varying from 0.66 to 0.87. The tri-gate length (l) was fixed at 700 nm and the height of tri-gate trench (h) was ~ 250 nm. A 150 nm-long gate recess (l_r) was defined by e-beam lithography, followed by a 20 nm-deep slow-etch-rate Cl_2 -based ICP etch. A metal stack composed of Ti/Al/Ti/Ni/Au was deposited in source and drain regions, followed by rapid thermal annealing. The gate dielectric was 25 nm-thick SiO_2 deposited by atomic layer deposition (ALD), without any further passivation layers. Finally, gate and contact pads were formed by Ni/Au. Devices with planar gates (planar) and recessed planar gates (recessed) were fabricated on the same

batch with same process conditions for comparison. All current values were normalized by the device width of 80 μm , and the standard deviation was determined from about 8 separate devices of the same kind.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The transfer characteristics of the Planar, Recessed Planar and Recessed tri-gate devices are shown in Fig. 2(a). A significant positive shift of V_{TH} was observed from -3.6 V (at 1 $\mu\text{A}/\text{mm}$) for the planar, to $+0.3$ V for the recessed and $+1.4$ V for the recessed tri-gate (Fig. 2(a)). The large V_{TH} in the recessed tri-gate is mainly due to the strain relaxation of the AlGaIn barrier and the sidewall gate modulation [16], [17], [23], [24]. The recessed tri-gate exhibited a larger g_m of 275 ± 12 mS/mm, with an ON/OFF ratio beyond 10^9 , an improved SS of 95 ± 3 mV/dec and I_{OFF} at $V_G = 0$ V as small as 300 pA/mm, as compared with planar and recessed devices, revealing an improved tri-gate control over electrons in the channel. The small hysteresis below 0.5 V for all devices, under different V_G up to 8 V (Fig. 2(b)) indicates a good oxide quality. The recessed tri-gate devices showed the smallest hysteresis of 0.18 ± 0.05 V (at V_G^{max} of 8 V) compared to 0.47 ± 0.09 V of recessed planar and 0.53 ± 0.06 V. Moreover, the recessed tri-gate presented a much narrower V_{TH} distribution among all measured devices, with an average V_{TH} of $+1.41 \pm 0.12$ V, confirming the excellent gate uniformity of our process.

The output characteristics of these devices are shown in Fig. 2(c). The recessed tri-gate presented a larger I_D^{max} of 622 ± 16 mA/mm at $V_G = 7$ V compared to 581 ± 34 mA/mm for the recessed planar, which was only slightly smaller than that of the planar D-mode device (672 ± 19 mA/mm) (Fig. 2(c)). The degraded output characteristic of recessed planar devices shown in Fig. 2(c) is likely due to the short recess length of 150 nm, since the recessed planar with 500 nm-long recessed region presented good output characteristics. The recessed tri-gate presented much better performance with the same recess length of 150 nm, revealing a better channel control of the tri-gate combined with a narrow gate recess. The negative output resistance of these devices is mostly due to the self-heating. The R_{ON} of planar, recessed and recessed tri-gate, extracted from $I_D - V_D$ sweeps in linear region, were 6.82 ± 0.29 $\Omega \cdot \text{mm}$, 7.37 ± 0.45 $\Omega \cdot \text{mm}$, and 7.32 ± 0.26 $\Omega \cdot \text{mm}$ at $V_G = 7$ V, respectively (Fig. 2(d)). The recessed tri-gate required a much smaller gate driving voltage to reach low R_{ON} (Fig. 2(d)), as compared to the recessed planar devices, which is due to the superior control of the tri-gate recessed over electrons in the channel that results in a larger g_m compared to the planar recessed device.

The low R_{ON} and large I_D^{max} of the recessed tri-gate are a consequence of the trench conduction in the tri-gate geometry. To illustrate this, we fabricated recessed tri-gate devices with w of 200, 400, 500, and 600 nm and fixed s of 100 nm, corresponding to a number of tri-gate wires per mm (N_{NW}) of 3333, 2000, 1666, and 1333, respectively. The R_{ON} was extracted at $V_G = 7$ V for all recessed tri-gate device, since the small difference in V_{TH} is negligible compared to the driving voltage, and the R_{ON} is already saturated at this V_G .

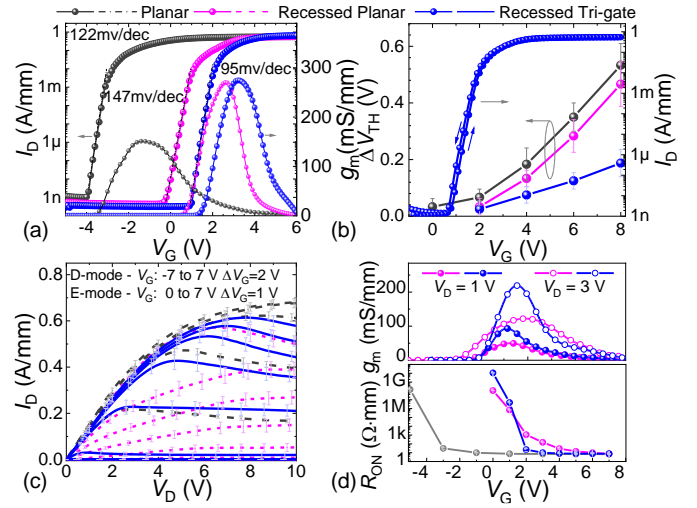


Fig. 2. Comparison of the normally-off recessed tri-gate with planar and recessed devices. (a) Transfer at $V_{\text{DS}} = 5$ V and (b) Measured $I_D^{\text{max}} - \Delta V_{\text{TH}}$ dependence of planar, recessed and recessed tri-gate devices and gate hysteresis up to 8 V of recessed tri-gate transistor. (c) Output characteristics of the three devices with V_G up to 7 V. (d) g_m of recessed planar and recessed tri-gate MOSFET under V_D of 1 V and 3 V and extracted $V_G - R_{\text{ON}}$ dependence of planar, recessed and recessed tri-gate transistors. The L_{GS} , L_G and L_{GD} were 1.25 and 15 μm , respectively, and FF was 0.66. Standard deviation bars were determined from the measurement of 8 devices of each type, revealing their consistent performance.

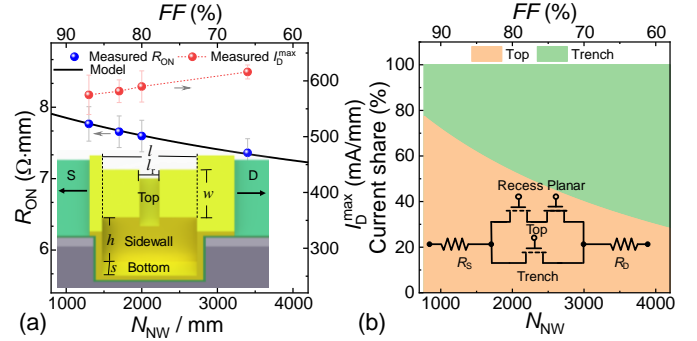


Fig. 3. (a) R_{ON} and I_D^{max} of the recessed tri-gate versus the number of nanowires (N_{NW}) and fill factor (FF) in the tri-gate region. (b) Current share in the recessed tri-gate region. Insets: Schematic and equivalent circuit of the recessed tri-gate.

An increase in I_D^{max} and a reduction of R_{ON} were observed when increasing N_{NW} (Fig. 3(a)). This can be understood with an equivalent model of the recessed tri-gate MOSFET (inset of Fig. 3(a)) consisting of 2 parallel parts of the top (recessed + planar) and trench portions of the tri-gate (sidewall and bottom portions), plus the source (R_S) and drain (R_D) contact and access resistances (inset of Fig. 3(b)). Thus the total R_{ON} can be written as:

$$R_{\text{ON}} = \left\{ \left[\left(\frac{R_{\text{sh}}^{\text{r}} \cdot l_r + R_{\text{sh}}^{\text{p}} \cdot (l - l_r)}{w} \right)^{-1} + \left(\frac{R_{\text{sh}}^{\text{trench}} \cdot l}{2h} \right)^{-1} \right] N_{\text{NW}} \right\}^{-1} + R_S + R_D$$

Where, R_{sh}^{r} and R_{sh}^{p} are the equivalent sheet resistances of the recessed and top planar regions, respectively. We assumed an equivalent sheet resistance for the sidewall and bottom parts ($R_{\text{sh}}^{\text{trench}}$) to simplify the model [25]–[27]. The R_{sh}^{r} and R_{sh}^{p} were obtained by averaging 7 separate planar and recessed gated halls, respectively, resulting in R_{sh}^{r} and R_{sh}^{p} of 269 ± 7 Ω/sq and 1713 ± 92 Ω/sq (at $V_G = 7$ V). The R_S and R_D were calculated

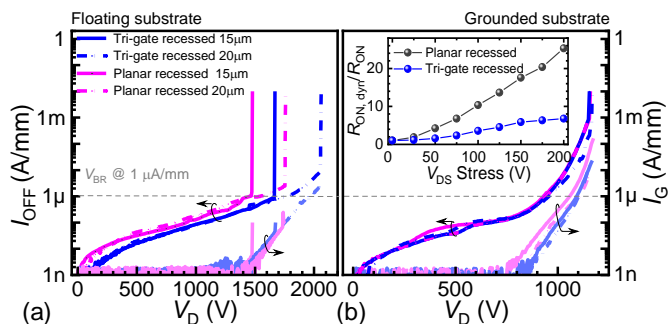


Fig. 4. Breakdown characteristics of the recessed ($V_G = -1$ V) and recessed tri-gate ($V_G = 0$ V) MOSFETs with $L_{GD} = 15$ μm and 20 μm , for (a) grounded and (b) floating substrate. Inset: Dynamic R_{ON} of unpassivated recessed planar and recessed tri-gate transistors measured up to a quiescent bias stress of 200 V with a pulse width of 50 μs and a period of 5 ms.

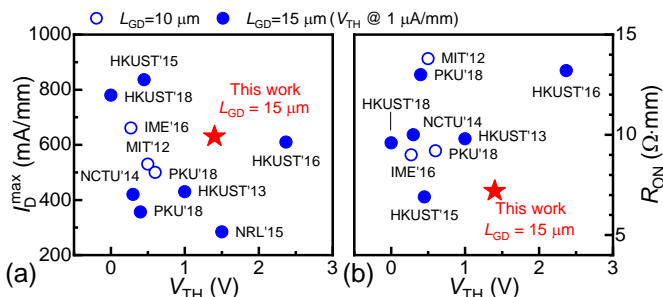


Fig. 5. Benchmarking of (a) I_D^{max} and (b) R_{ON} versus V_{TH} (defined at 1 $\mu\text{A}/\text{mm}$) of the recessed tri-gate against E-mode GaN-on-Si transistors. For fair comparison, L_{GD} smaller than 10 μm were not included.

based on the planar sheet resistance and contact resistance from separate TLM on the same wafer. To determine the missing variable R_{sh}^{trench} , the measured R_{ON} versus N_{NW} was fitted using this model (black curve in Fig. 3(a)), resulting in R_{sh}^{trench} of 3355 ± 138 Ω/sq . Based on these values, we calculated the share of current flowing at the top and sidewall regions (Fig. 3(b)). For large FF , the main contribution to conduction is from the top region, whereas by reducing FF , N_{NW} is increased and the contribution from the sidewalls becomes dominant.

The breakdown voltage of the devices was measured with floating (Fig. 4(a)) and grounded substrates (Fig. 4(b)), with $V_G = 0$ V. The observed breakdown mainly happened at the edge of gate. With floating substrate, the soft V_{BR} at I_{OFF} of 1 $\mu\text{A}/\text{mm}$ of the recessed tri-gate with L_{GD} of 15 μm and 20 μm were 1650 V and 1800 V, respectively. A large hard V_{BR} of 2050 V was measured for the recessed tri-gate with L_{GD} of 20 μm (at $I_{OFF} = 9$ $\mu\text{A}/\text{mm}$). The gate leakage was ~ 1 nA/mm until 1400 V. A V_{BR} of 960 V at 1 $\mu\text{A}/\text{mm}$ was observed with grounded substrate, for both recessed and recessed tri-gate, with a high hard breakdown of 1100 V, which was mainly limited by the buffer thickness and quality. The observed improvement in V_{BR} compared with the recessed devices is mainly due to the integrated field plates (FP) in the recessed tri-gate. The gate region in the recessed tri-gate device contains two FPs: tri-gate FP (FP₁) from the recess edge to tri-gate drain-side edge, and planar FP (FP₂) from the tri-gate drain-side edge to gate drain-side edge (Fig.1(b)). These regions function as two gate-connected FPs, due to their more negative pinch-off voltages compared to the recessed region, of -2 V in the tri-gate FP and -4 V in the planar FP [17]–[20]. With increasing V_D , the 2DEG under FP₁ and FP₂ are sequentially depleted, reducing the

electric field in the recessed gate region and leading to a much enhanced V_{BR} [28], [29]. In addition, despite the lack of passivation in both devices, this additional FP also improved the dynamic R_{ON} of the recessed tri-gate devices by better distributing the electric field under the gate, as supported by [30], [31] (inset of Fig.4 (b)). The measured floating breakdown voltage could be affected by virtual gating, which can be resolved by a proper passivation process without sacrificing the breakdown voltage [32]–[34].

The I_D^{max} and R_{ON} versus V_{TH} of the recessed tri-gate devices in this work were benchmarked against E-mode GaN transistors in the literature, demonstrating concurrently high I_D^{max} , low R_{ON} and large V_{TH} of 1.4 V (Fig. 5(a,b)), with $R_{ON,SP}$ of 1.76 and 2.42 $\text{m}\Omega\cdot\text{cm}^2$ for L_{GD} of 15 μm and 20 μm , respectively. These results highlight the benefits of combining tri-gate structures and narrow gate recess for high-performance normally-off devices.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

In this work we have demonstrated state-of-the-art normally-off recessed tri-gate GaN-on-Si MOSFETs by combining tri-gates with a short barrier recess. Due to trench conduction in the tri-gate region, the devices presented concurrently large positive V_{TH} of 1.4 V at 1 $\mu\text{A}/\text{mm}$, along with high I_D^{max} of 622 ± 16 mA/mm at $V_G = 7$ V and low R_{ON} of 7.32 ± 0.26 $\Omega\cdot\text{mm}$. The excellent channel control from the tri-gate structure enhanced the V_{TH} stability, reduced gate driving voltage and increased the transconductance. These results unveil the excellent prospect of recessed tri-gate for power applications.

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