High Voltage GaN Schottky Rectifiers

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Abstract—Mesa and planar GaN Schottky diode rectifiers with reverse breakdown voltages \((V_{BR})\) up to 550 and \(>2000\) V, respectively, have been fabricated. The on-state resistance, \(R_{ON}\), was 6 m\(\Omega\)-cm\(^2\) and 0.8 \(\Omega\)-cm\(^2\), respectively, producing figure-of-merit values for \((V_{BR})^2/RO_N\) in the range 5–48 MW-cm\(^2\). At low biases the reverse leakage current was proportional to the size of the rectifying contact perimeter, while at high biases the area was proportional to the area of this contact. These results suggest that at low reverse biases, the leakage is dominated by the surface component, while at high biases the bulk component dominates. On-state voltages were 3.5 V for the 550 V diodes and \(>15\) for the 2 kV diodes. Reverse recovery times were \(<0.2\ \mu s\) for devices switched from a forward current density of \(\sim 500\ \text{A} \cdot \text{cm}^{-2}\) to a reverse bias of 100 V.

Index Terms—GaN, power electronics, rectifiers.

I. INTRODUCTION

WIDE bandgap diode rectifiers are attractive devices for a range of high power, high temperature applications, including solid-state drives for heavy motors, pulsed power for electric vehicles or ships, drive trains for electric automobiles and utilities transmission and distribution [1]. To date, most effort has been focussed on SiC and a full range of power devices including thyristors, insulated gate bipolar transistors, metal oxide semiconductor field effect transistors and pin and Schottky rectifiers, has been reported [2]–[13]. The GaN materials systems is also attractive for ultra high power electronic devices because of its wide bandgap and excellent transport properties [13], [14]. A potential disadvantage for thick, carrier-modulated devices is the low minority carrier lifetime, but for unipolar devices GaN has the potential for higher switching speed and larger standoff voltage than SiC.

Efforts to fabricate high power GaN devices are in their infancy and there have been reports of simple Schottky rectifiers with reverse breakdown voltage \((V_{BR})\) in the range 350–450 V [15], [16]. While pin rectifiers would be expected to have larger blocking voltages, the Schottky rectifiers are attractive for their faster switching speed and lower forward voltage drop.

In this paper we report on the fabrication of mesa and planar GaN Schottky diode rectifiers. We have found that mesa structures formed by dry etching can have similar \((V_{BR})\) values to planar diodes provided the dry etch damage is removed by annealing or wet etch clean-up. The mesa diodes have lower specific on-resistances because ohmic contacts can be formed on a heavily doped GaN layer below the undoped standoff layer.

II. EXPERIMENTAL

Two different types of GaN were grown on c-plane sapphire substrates by metal organic chemical vapor deposition using trimethylgallium and ammonia as the precursors. For structures intended for vertical depletion, a 1 \(\mu m\) thick \(n^+\) (3\(\times10^{18}\) cm\(^{-3}\), Si doped) contact layer was grown in a low temperature GaN buffer and then followed with either 4 or 11 \(\mu m\) of undoped \((n \sim 2 \times 10^{16}\) cm\(^{-3}\)) GaN. For structures intended for lateral depletion, a 3 \(\mu m\) thick resistive \((n < 10^{15}\) cm\(^{-3}\)) active region was grown on a low temperature buffer.

The mesas were formed by Cl:\(2\)/Ar inductively coupled plasma etching (300 W source power, 40 W rf chuck power, corresponding to a dc self-bias of \(-85\) V) at a rate of 1100 \(\text{A} \cdot \text{min}^{-1}\), using a photoresist mask. The samples were annealed at \(\sim 800\) \(\circ\)C to remove dry etch damage [17]. Ohmic contacts were formed by lift-off of e-beam evaporated Ti/Al, subsequently annealed at 750 \(\circ\)C for 20 s under N\(_2\). The rectifying contacts with diameter 60–1100 \(\mu m\) were formed by lift-off of e-beam evaporated Pt/Al.

On the lateral diodes, \(n^+\) contact regions were formed by implantation of \(Si^+\) followed by annealing at 1150\(\circ\)C for 10 s under N\(_2\). The GaN was protected by a dielectric encapsulant during the annealing step. The ohmic and rectifying contacts were formed as described above. Schematics of the two different structures are shown in Fig. 1. The current–voltage \((I–V)\) characteristics were recorded on a HP 4145A parameter analyzer.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Mesa Diodes

A typical \(I–V\) characteristic for the 11 \(\mu m\) undoped depletion layer diodes is shown in Fig. 2. The \(V_{BR}\) for these devices was 550 V at 25 \(\circ\)C, with typical \(V_{BR}\)’s of 3–5 V (100 A \(\cdot\) cm\(^{-2}\)). The specific on-resistance was in the range 6–10 m\(\Omega\)-cm\(^2\), leading...
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Fig. 1. Schematic of mesa and planar GaN diodes.

The specific on-resistance of these devices was 28 mΩ·cm², leading to a value of \( (V_{RB})^2/R_{ON} \) of 42 MW·cm⁻². The breakdown voltage of these devices was 356 V, with typical \( V_F \) values of 3–5 V (100 Å·cm⁻²). The ideality factor of these devices was 2, suggesting recombination. At slightly higher biases (4–4.5 V), the ideality factor is 1.5. This type of result has been reported previously in SiC diodes \([6]\) and a multiple level recombination model involving the presence of both shallow and deep levels in the space charge region was developed to explain that data \([18]\). In our diodes, we used the linear part of the \( V-I \) curves to obtain the on-resistance. Once again the breakdown voltage was approximately a factor of three lower than the theoretical maximum value for this doping and thickness.

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is proportional to contact area indicating that bulk leakage is dominant. In SiC devices it has been reported that increases in leakage current in the voltage range approximately half the $V_{RB}$ of the diodes are due to the presence of this interfacial layer (typically as oxide) between the rectifying contact and the semiconductor. This oxide can sustain a voltage drop, but is thin enough for carrier tunnelling [6]. Fig. 6 shows reverse recovery current transient waveforms from a diode switched from a forward current density of 500 A/cm$^2$ to a reverse voltage of 100 V. The recovery time is $\leq 0.2 \mu s$, similar to values reported for SiC rectifiers [6].

In all wide bandgap diode rectifiers (both SiC and the GaN reported here), the magnitude of the reverse leakage currents are generally one to two orders higher than the theoretical values based on image-force lowering of the Schottky barrier [6]. Our GaN diodes have slightly higher reverse leakage relative to SiC devices at the same biases, which probably reflects the earlier stage of maturity of the former.

### B. Lateral, Planar Diodes

Fig. 7 shows a room temperature $I$–$V$ characteristic from the 3 $\mu$m thick structure. The $V_{RB}$ was $>2000$ V (the limit of our test setup), with a best $V_F$ of 15 V (more typically 50–60 V). The specific on-resistance was 0.8 $\Omega \cdot \text{cm}^2$ producing a $(V_{RB})^2/R_{ON}$ value of $>15$ MW-cm$^{-2}$. For this structure we believe the depletion is lateral, because for the larger thickness and doping a vertical device would breakdown at 1000V. TEM cross-sections of the structure showed a threading dislocation density of $\sim 3 \times 10^6$ cm$^{-2}$, typical of high quality GaN of this thickness.

To place the results in context, Fig. 8 shows a plot of specific on-resistance for Schottky diode rectifiers as a function of breakdown voltage. The lines are theoretical values for Si, 4H–SiC, 6H–SiC and GaN and the points are experimental values for SiC and GaN devices [2]–[6], [10], [13], [15], [16]. Note that the 356 V and 2 kV diodes reported here essentially fit on the line expected for perfect Si devices, but the 550 V diode has clearly superior performance to Si. However there is still significant improvement required before GaN matches the reported performance of SiC Schottky rectifiers.
The main conclusions of our study can be summarized as follows.

1. Mesa diodes with $V_{RB}$ equal to planar diodes, but with improved $R_{ON}$ values, have been fabricated in GaN using Cl$_2$/Ar dry etching, followed by annealing to remove the plasma damage.

2. $V_{RB}$ values up to 550 V with figure-of-merit 48 MW-cm$^{-2}$ have been achieved on mesa diodes fabricated on thick (12 µm total) MOVCD GaN.

3. $V_{RB}$ values $>2$ kV have been achieved in lateral diodes fabricated on resistive GaN grown by MOVCD.

4. For the mesa diodes, the $V_{RB}$ values are approximately a factor of three lower than the theoretical maximum for GaN based on avalanche breakdown. Similarly, the reverse leakage currents are several orders of magnitude higher than the theoretical values.

5. At low reverse biases, the leakage current is dominated by contributions from the surface, while at higher biases bulk leakage dominates.

**REFERENCES**


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