

A Synopsis for Understanding and Fully Exploiting the Values of Beavers While Solving the Conflict with Them©

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- Following the Fur Trade (ca 1600-1900), beavers have been slowly re-occupying their damming habitats (DHs): Low-gradient areas on small streams. The return of these rich, open wetlands restores a fragment of the ancient landscape in which all native species, including fish, evolved.
- Beaver “flowages” have many hydrological values. For instance, they sequester sediments, purify water, and act as sponges, reducing destructive peak flows during floods. Beautiful, they also have aesthetic value. Beavers’ prestigious ecological title, “Keystone Species,” is too narrow.
- Agriculture and other forms of development have destroyed the majority of wetlands, which were rare to begin with. Beavers provide a unique opportunity to reverse some of those losses.
- Without beavers present, dams decay and wetlands drain. During the Fur Trade this led hundreds of thousands of flowages to become forested. Today, responsible wildlife agencies will ensure that populations of this invaluable animal are robust, and that this event remains an anomaly.
- Most conflicts occur where thoroughfares intersect DH. Little holes in manmade dams called roads, culverts are ideal damming sites—magnets for an animal adept at dispersing. As proven repeatedly for decades at thousands of sites, “killing” never eliminates conflict points (CPs), but it can prevent the restoration of nearby wetland complexes, which requires a lot of time and effort.
- Given the geographical limits of DH, the average town only has a handful of CPs. However, kill strategies, which include un-clogging culverts, breaching dams, and repairing properties in endless cycles, quickly turn a few points into hundreds of costly conflict events.
- High-quality flow devices (HQDs) protect properties by sneaking water away from beavers. They can end conflicts *and* maximize wetland values. The only effective option is an overall war on beavers and their extirpation from the general vicinity of CPs. Building HQDs is a serious engineering challenge that requires a full understanding of beavers, their habitat, and aquatic construction. However, a CF can be erased for decades by one person in a day. In the 1950s, NH had the world’s first major flow device program, and the leading practitioners work here today.
- A general transition away from lethal defenses would benefit all taxpayers, but especially sportsmen. For fur trappers, killing non-prime “nuisance beavers” in spring and summer could be avoided, orphaned baby beavers would not starve to death, and overall populations could be higher. For trappers, hunters, and anglers, many more wetlands could be created that provide fantastic habitats for furbearers, waterfowl, large game animals, and fish like brook trout.