

Economic Value

Humans have utilized beavers as a fur and food product in Massachusetts for several thousand years. Like early colonists and native Americans, people continue to harvest beavers for their fur, meat, leather, and glands. The difference between the harvest of beavers today and that of colonial times is that the beaver harvest is now closely regulated.

Beavers are a protected species in Massachusetts and there are over 26 laws and regulations that control when and how beavers may be taken. In Massachusetts, approximately 1,300 beavers are harvested annually, providing a total of \$40,000 in income for households in the state. Aside from using the pelts to make garments like coats, hats, gloves, and blankets, over one-third of the fur harvesters utilize beaver as a food source for themselves or their pets. Parts of beavers are used to make perfumes; other parts are used to make customized leather products like wallets. Regulated harvests also serve to maintain beaver populations at levels that are consistent with available habitat.

Aesthetic, Recreational and Educational Values

Beavers are also valued by people who simply enjoy watching or photographing them. Beaver ponds are enjoyable places to visit to observe brilliant fall foliage or watch wildlife. Fishermen and canoeists appreciate the quiet solitude of beaver ponds early in the morning. Teachers recognize beaver ponds as ideal places for "pond study," where concepts of food webs, predator-prey relationships, and interdependence are easily demonstrated.

All told, beavers are exceptionally valuable components of healthy ecosystems in Massachusetts. As wetland creators, furbearers, creators of varied habitats for wildlife and fish, and subjects of interest for children and adults, they provide us with a myriad of benefits.

Conflicts Between Beavers and People

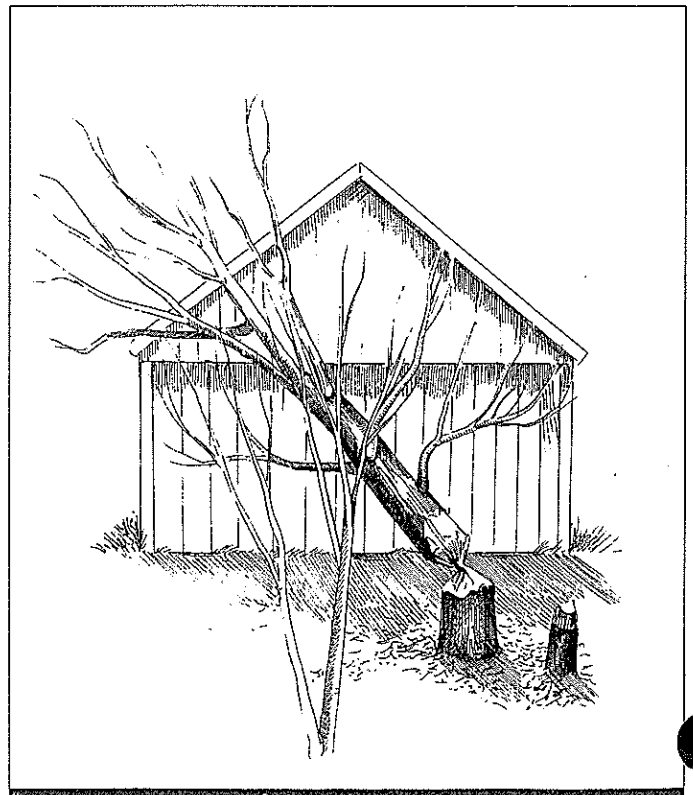
Damage to Ornamental Trees and Shrubs

Beavers gnaw trees and shrubs for food, for building material, and for other reasons not entirely known to us. Although this is an important mechanism for habitat creation and

transformation, it can also result in damage to important shade trees, ornamental trees, and shrubs.

Houses, Roads, and Power Lines

Beavers do not appear to be able to control where trees will fall. Occasionally, beavers are crushed by trees that they themselves cut down. Where people and beavers occur together, it is only natural to expect that some trees will fall on cars, roads, railroad tracks, power lines, houses, or other structures. Although less common than other forms of damage, it can be a cause for serious concern.





Flooding

Residential, commercial, and agricultural development in low lying areas adjacent to streams and ponds is vulnerable to inundation when beavers move into the area. A common concern is the flooding of roads. Culverts are particularly susceptible to the beavers' unceasing drive to stop flowing water. Drinking water can become contaminated when wells and septic systems are flooded. Houses and other structures that are inappropriately located in floodplains are also vulnerable.

Effects on Cold-Water Fisheries

When beavers dam up a stream to produce a pond they also change the physical and chemical nature of the stream. Currents are slowed, water temperatures rise, and dissolved oxygen levels drop. Warm water fish, like perch and bass, benefit from the change. Trout prefer cold, well-

oxygenated water. Although they may benefit from beaver activity in the first three or four years, they are negatively affected by long-term beaver presence.

Concerns About Water Quality

Beavers are often associated with concerns about the quality of drinking water. Water exiting a beaver pond is high in organic chemicals and may be a cause for concern if beaver ponds are located near public water supplies. Giardiasis, an intestinal ailment cause by a *Giardia* parasite, is referred to by some as "beaver fever" because beaver are known to carry the organism. Although beavers do carry the *Giardia* parasite, so do many other animals that are found around lakes and reservoirs. Despite this, beavers will continue to be the primary focus for concern because they spend so much time swimming in our drinking water.

Avoiding and Resolving Conflicts

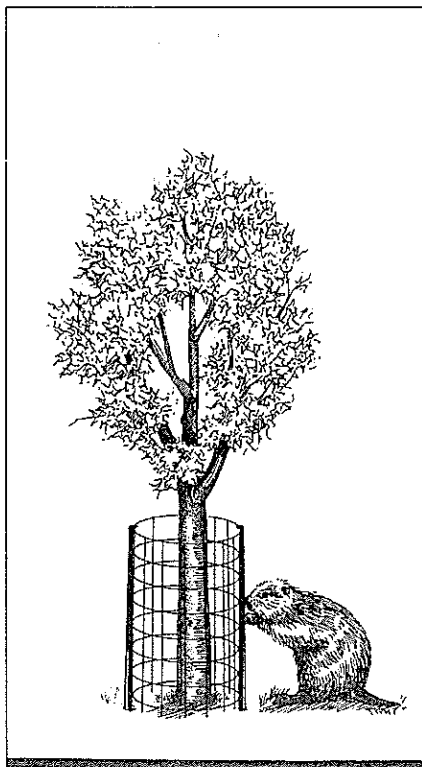
Tolerance

Beavers, like human beings, are adaptable and can readily tolerate living in close association with people. Likewise, people who learn to tolerate a certain amount of beaver influence on their land generally find that co-existing with beavers provides many benefits. In situations in which beavers are simply an inconvenience to landowners, tolerance is the easiest solution. However, when beaver activity results in property damage or concerns about public health and safety, there are a number of steps that may be taken to alleviate the problems.

Exclosures

The most effective way to protect specific trees and shrubs is to construct exclosures around them. Exclosures should be constructed of heavy-gauge fencing and placed around the base of trees or shrubs. Exclosures should be a minimum of four feet tall and should be flush with the ground at the bottom. Chicken wire is no match for the incisors and powerful chewing muscles of beavers; stick to heavy-gauge fencing material.

Nurseries and orchards can be protected with fencing to prohibit beaver access. Standard fencing is usually sufficient since beavers are poor climbers, rarely burrow under fences, and generally don't chew fencing unless it is wrapped around trees or shrubs. In some cases, a single-strand electric fence placed four to six inches off the ground will effectively exclude beavers. Although removal of nuisance animals may appear to be a



cheaper and easier method to control beaver damage, fencing provides a more long range solution and preserves the beneficial aspects of beavers, as well.

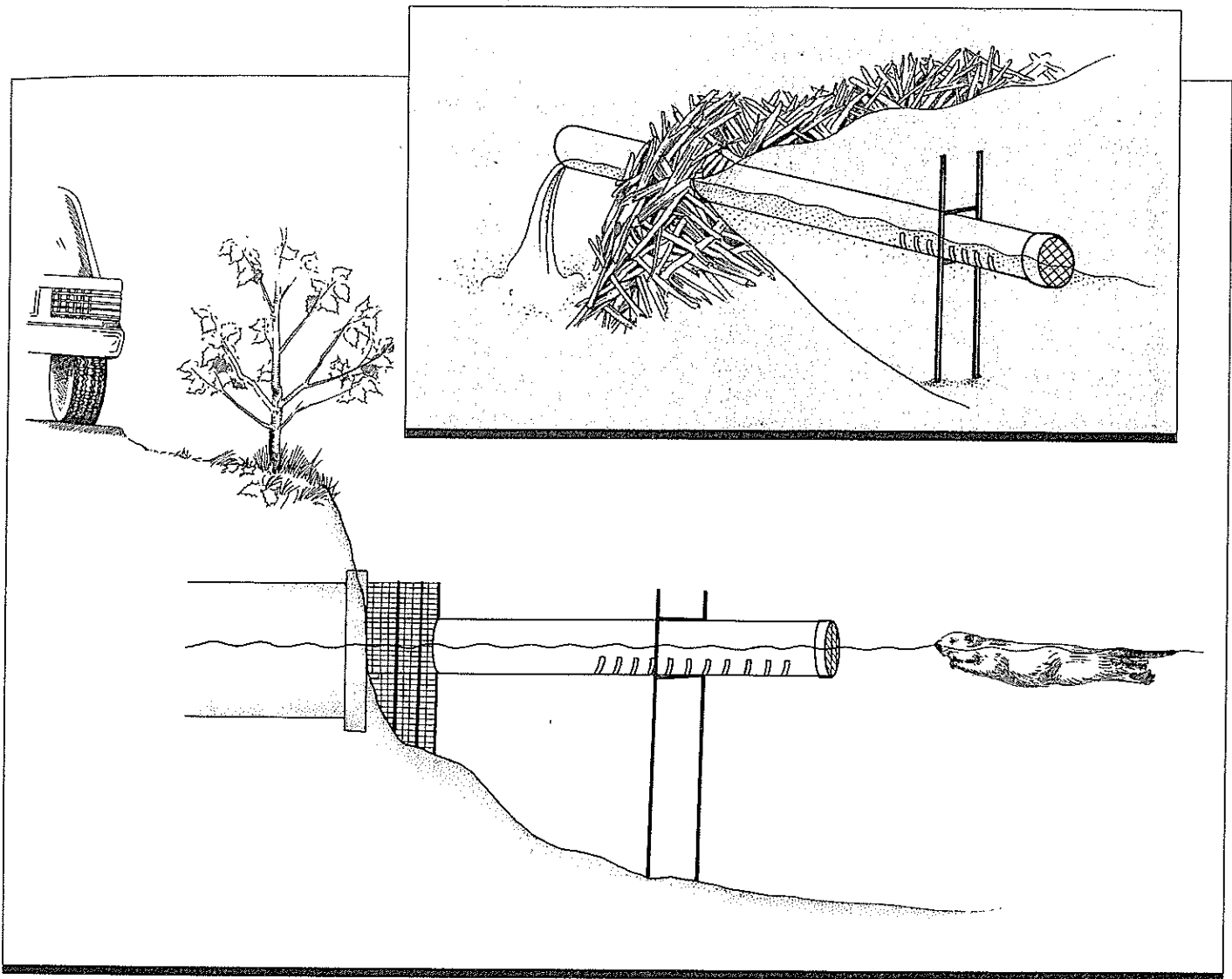
Water Flow Devices

In situations in which increased water levels resulting from beaver activity threaten property, crops, or public health and safety, water flow devices may be an appropriate way to control the flooding. Sometimes referred to as "beaver pipe," these water flow devices have proven successful at regulating water levels behind beaver dams. Generally, one or more beaver pipes are placed in a beaver dam at an elevation that will regulate water at the desired level. Beaver pipes can be constructed out of a variety of materials. The most effective type used in Massachusetts is made of aluminum piping. With regular maintenance, water flow devices made of proper, durable materials can alleviate flooding for several years.

Water flow devices can also be used to maintain flows in road culverts that are repeatedly blocked by beavers. A similar kind of pipe is used, along with fencing to keep beavers from the culvert entrances. Two factors are key to the success of these devices: they must be designed to reduce the cues used by beavers to detect escaping water, and they must be difficult for beavers to plug.

Beaver pipes should only be used where appropriate conditions exist. Depth of water behind the dam, stream flow, and size of the wetland upstream are among the considerations. Proper installation of pipes is also important if flooding is to be controlled. Height of the pipe from the pond bottom, angle of the pipe, as well as number and diameter of pipes needed to accommodate the stream flow must all be evaluated upon installation. **Do not try to install water control devices on your own.**

In Massachusetts, it is illegal to disturb beaver dams or beaver lodges without a permit (see "Permits" on page 12).



Repellents and Harassment

As of this writing, there are no known or registered repellents that are effective against beavers. Experience to date indicates that harassment is generally ineffective at persuading beavers to leave an area.

Removal

Removal of a nuisance beaver should be considered only as a last resort, and then only when there is property damage or a threat to public health and safety. Problem animals may be trapped during the open season in accordance with Massachusetts trapping regulations. A permit

from the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife is required to trap or kill beavers during other times of the year. Trapping and relocating beavers is not allowed in Massachusetts.

Removal of problem animals can be a relatively quick way to alleviate beaver problems when done by an experienced trapper. However, if appropriate habitat exists, it is possible that other beavers may eventually move into the area. Addressing habitat features at the stream site with other techniques (water flow devices) may stabilize the wetland and prevent future property damage. By allowing beavers to remain, a stabilized site will also help maintain the beneficial aspect of beavers.

Permits

Removal of Dams or Use of Flow Devices

In Massachusetts, there are several laws that govern beaver dams, beaver lodges and activities in wetlands in general.

Under fish and wildlife laws, it is illegal to disturb beaver dams without a permit. There are no exemptions for any private individual or public agency from this permit requirement. Permits are also required to modify a beaver dam to install water flow devices. Contact the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife regional office nearest you for information about permits. (See page 16.)

Activities that will affect wetlands, such as dam removal or installation of beaver pipe, are also regulated by Massachusetts wetlands protection laws. Additional permits may be required under the Wetlands Protection Act (a state law protecting wetlands). If you obtain a permit from the Division to remove or alter a beaver dam, be sure to contact your local conservation commission before initiating any work. Violations of these laws have resulted in the seizure of equipment, liens placed on private property, and assessment of stiff penalties, fines, and costs associated with wetlands restoration.

Destruction of Beavers

At sites that are not conducive to the installation of flow devices or other mitigating techniques, beavers may only be removed in accordance with the following provisions of state wildlife regulations.

LEGAL HARVEST

The preferred option for removing a beaver from a problem site is to have the beaver taken by a licensed trapper during the open trapping season (late fall and winter).

SPECIAL PERMIT TO REMOVE BEAVER

In some cases a permit can be issued from the regional District office of the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife for the destruction of beavers causing property damage. This permit is issued only if other remedies have failed or are not applicable, and after Division staff have confirmed the urgency of the complaint. When issuing a permit, Division staff explain the uses of the permit, reporting requirements, and compliance with other laws.

Massachusetts law prohibits trapping and relocation of any wild animal, including beavers. The primary reason for this law is concern about the spread of wildlife diseases.

Beaver Population Growth

Year	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Adults	2	2	2	6	10	14	26	46	74	126
2 Yr Old	0	0	4	4	4	12	20	28	52	92
1 Yr Old	0	4	4	4	12	20	28	52	92	148
Kits	4	4	4	12	20	28	52	92	148	252
Total	6	10	14	26	46	74	126	218	356	608

Beaver Management

During the 1600s and 1700s, beavers were over-exploited by fur harvesters. Many beavers were also killed and their wetlands habitats drained by settlers building homes and farms.

As a result of unrestricted utilization, habitat loss, and the destruction of beavers as pests, they were virtually eliminated from Massachusetts and from large portions of North America by the time of the American Revolution. With the loss of beavers, many of the values associated with them (wetlands and wildlife habitat creation, aesthetics, economic benefits) were also lost. Fortunately, through active restoration and management programs, their populations have recovered and beavers again occupy most of their former range in Massachusetts.

Proper management of beaver populations is needed for two reasons: to address the negative aspects of beavers (property damage, health, and safety) and to ensure that this native species is never again eliminated from our state. To understand how beavers are managed in Massachusetts, it is important to understand something about the biology and dynamics of beaver populations.

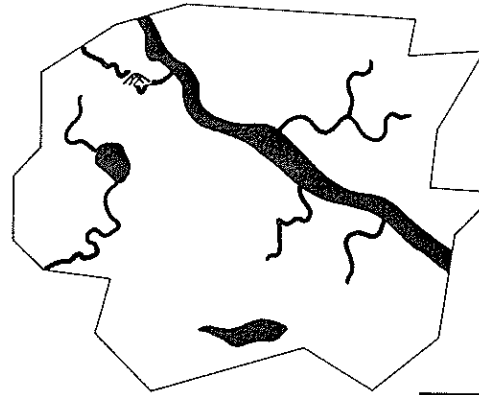
Beaver Populations

In general, two major factors affect the state's beaver population: the number of beavers born and the number of beavers that are removed from the population each year. Beaver populations are also limited by the amount of suitable habitat available to them. The *table at left and chart at right* show how quickly beaver populations can grow and use up available habitat in a given area. This simple model shows the growth of a hypothetical population, beginning with two adults and increasing with the addition each year of four young for each pair of adult beavers. This gives an indication of what could happen to the state's beaver population if no animals were removed.

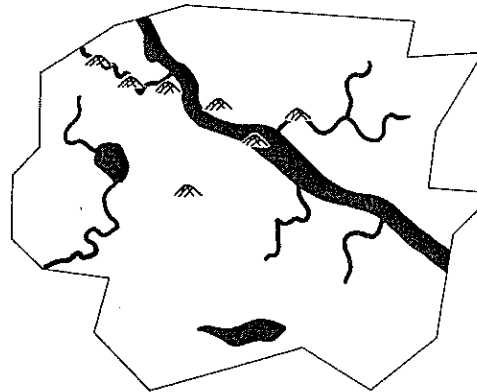
For over ten thousand years, humans and timber wolves were the most significant predators of beavers in

Population Growth Within a Watershed

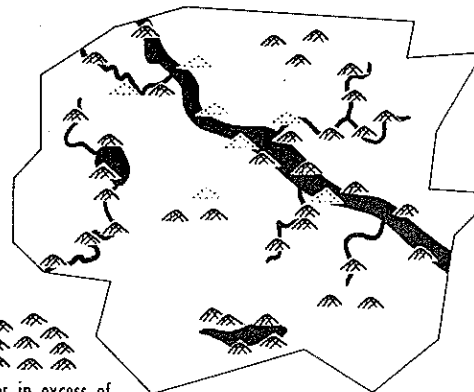
KEY:  active colony  abandoned colony



YEAR 1



YEAR 5



colonies in excess of watershed capacity

YEAR 10

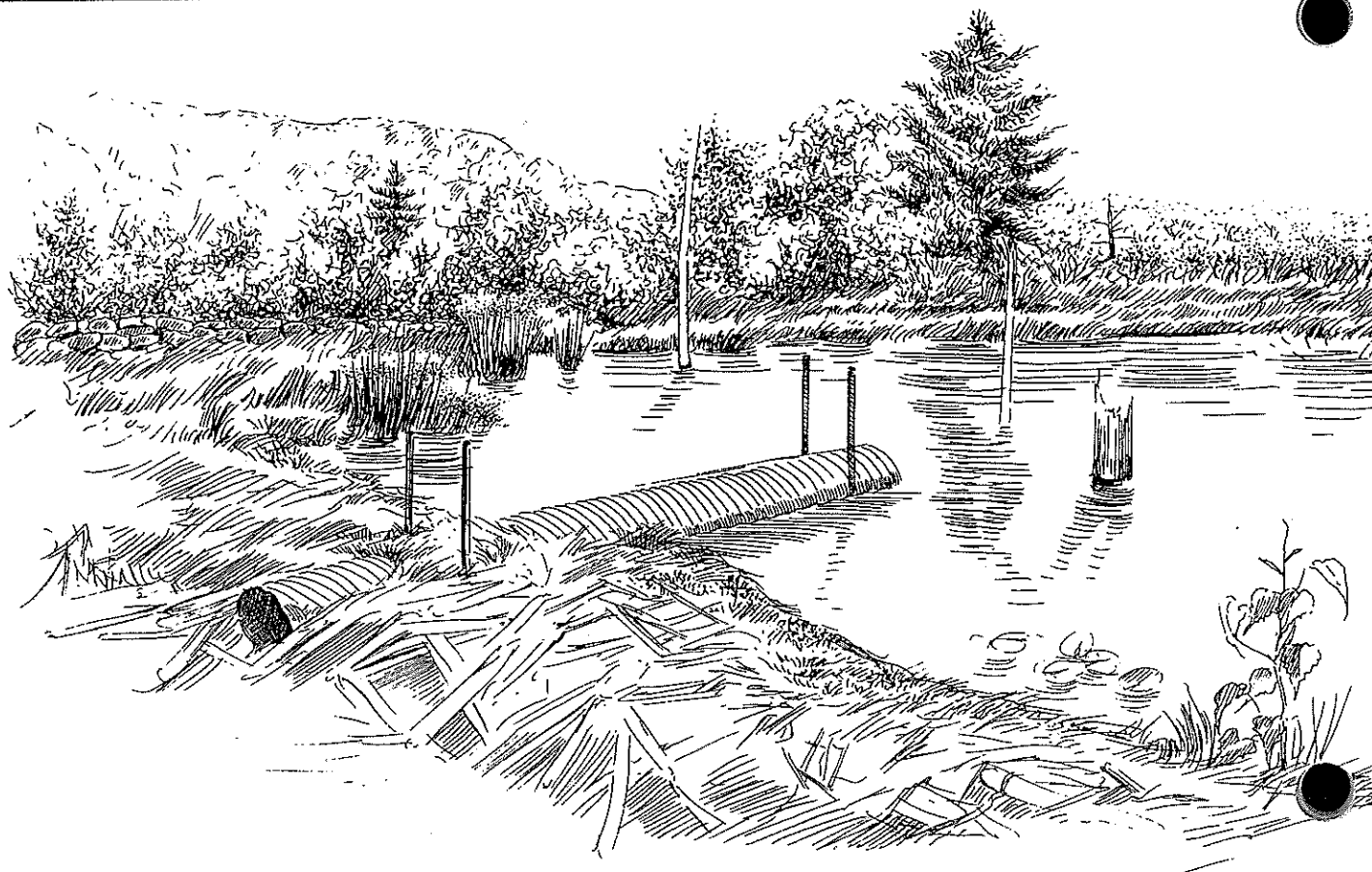
Massachusetts, hunting and utilizing beavers and thereby subtracting them from the population. Timber wolves preyed extensively on beavers and undoubtedly exerted some control on beaver numbers. However, wolves were eliminated from Massachusetts in the early 1800s and are unlikely to return. Although otters, coyotes, and bobcats occasionally prey on beavers, they generally take too few to significantly influence beaver populations. Humans (through the regulated trapping season) are the primary mechanism available for removing beavers from the population and controlling their numbers. If the state's beaver population were allowed to grow uncontrollably it would inevitably result in increased property damage and flooding.

The most serious threat to the long-term survival of beavers in Massachusetts is the encroachment of human

development on their habitats. With over six million people currently living in the state, homes and shopping centers have already had a significant impact on beaver habitat. As human developments continue to fragment the landscape, areas available for beavers and other wildlife are diminishing. As people encroach on wetland habitats, conflicts between people and beavers occur more frequently.

Management in Massachusetts

The essential challenge for beaver management is to find ways to co-exist with beavers that maximize their beneficial aspects yet minimize conflicts with people. The Division of Fisheries and Wildlife uses regulated trapping, exclosures, water control devices and public education promoting tolerance as means to meet that challenge.

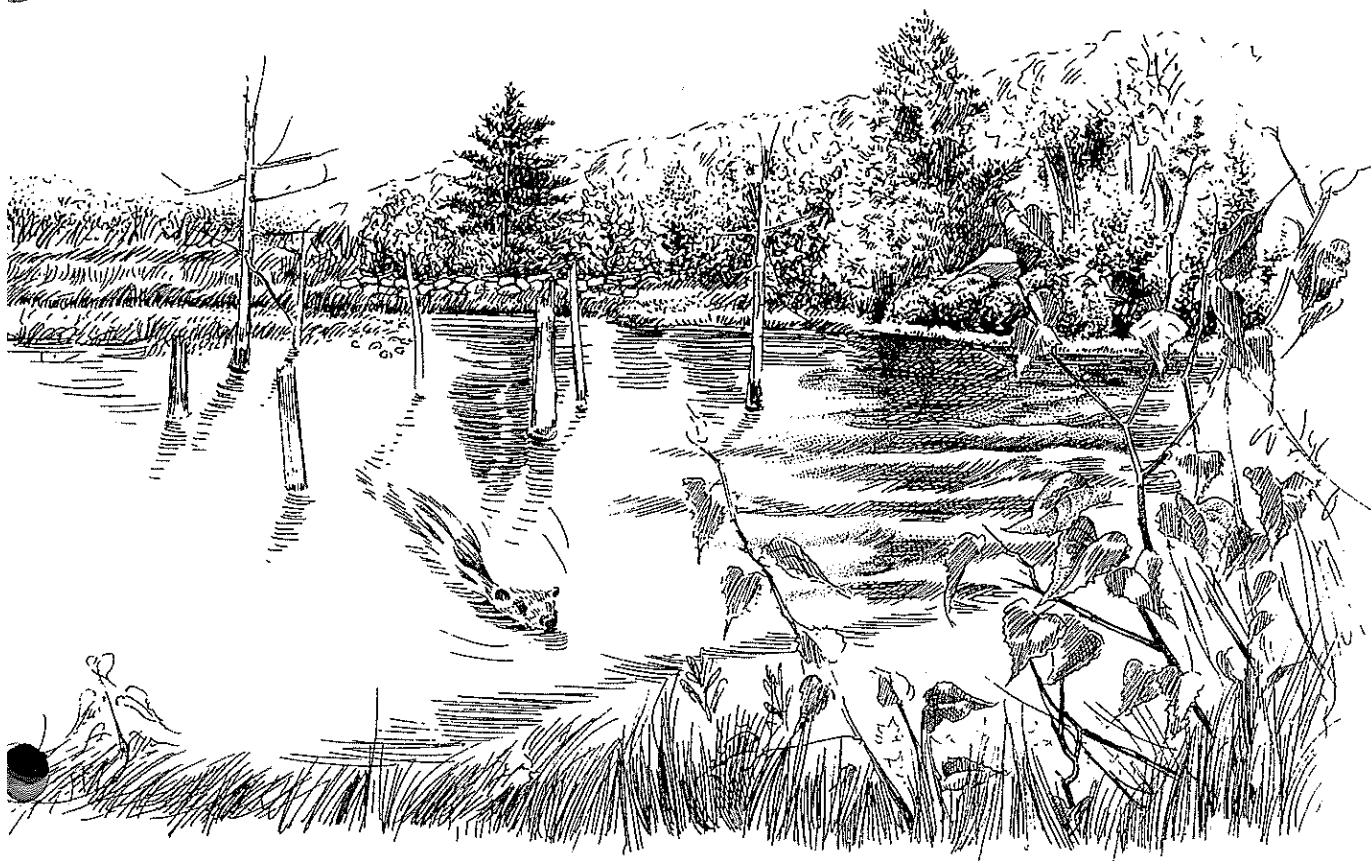


Goals established for beaver management include: maintaining beaver populations compatible with suitable habitat, minimizing property damage caused by beavers and managing beavers for their associated wetland and other values.

Wildlife biologists monitor the number and types of beaver complaints, assess habitat, and monitor the annual harvest of beavers. Biologists then make recommendations to increase or decrease beaver populations as needed. Regulated trapping is used as the most feasible and effective method for reducing or controlling beaver populations. The Division also has programs for investigating beaver complaints and utilizing flow devices to alleviate damage.

Successful management of beavers in Massachusetts will require a combination of all the techniques listed in

this booklet. Solutions to beaver damage problems are rarely simple and no one technique is a cure-all for beaver damage. For example, flow devices do not control beaver populations. At the same time, trapping of beavers at a complaint site does not change the features of the site that attracted beavers in the first place. In some cases, using both techniques (a flow device to control water levels and regulated trapping to control population levels) can provide a long-term solution to beaver problems. By following practices described in this booklet we can expect practical long term solutions to beaver problems, more secure and stable wetland complexes, and the creation and enhancement of wetland habitats on public and private land.



Additional Reading

Lily Pond: Four Years With a Family of Beavers, by Hope Ryden, 1989. William Morrow & Co., New York.

The World of the Beaver, by L.L. Rue III, 1964. Lippincott Co., Philadelphia and New York.

Wild Mammals of New England, by A. J. Godin, 1977. The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore.

Wild Mammals of North America: Biology - Management - Economics, by Joseph A. Chapman and George A. Feldhamer, 1982. The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore.

Wild Furbearer Management in North America, by Milan Novek, James A. Baker, Martyn E. Obbard and Bruce Mallock, 1987. Ontario Trappers Association, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, Toronto.

Beavers, Water, Wildlife and History, by Earl L. Hifiker, 1991. Heart of the Lakes Publishing, Interlaken.

Where to Go For Help

If you have a beaver complaint or would like more information on controlling beaver damage, contact the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife office nearest you.

Western Wildlife District

Hubbard Avenue
Pittsfield, MA 01201
(413) 447-9789

Connecticut Valley Wildlife District

East Street
Belchertown, MA 01007
(413) 323-7632

Central Wildlife District

Temple Street
West Boylston, MA 01583
(508) 835-3607

Northeast Wildlife District

Harris Street, Box 86
Acton, MA 01720
(508) 263-4347

Southeast Wildlife District

195 Bournedale Road
Buzzards Bay, MA 02532
(508) 759-3406