

BEAVER POLICY FOR P.E.I.

BACKGROUND

The beaver is native to Prince Edward Island. In the mid 1800's, they were extirpated at a time when beavers were unprotected and 75% of the land was cleared for agriculture. They were introduced in the early 1900's, extirpated in the 1920's and, again re-introduced in the late 1940's. Populations became well established in eastern Prince Edward Island and beavers now occupy suitable habitat throughout West Prince County.

BIOLOGY AND HARVEST

Beavers construct dams for protection, to gain access to food (poplar, willow, etc.) and to provide a means of storing their winter food. They normally breed at three or four years of age and produce an average litter of four kits. Their later maturation, low production rate and ease of location make them vulnerable to over exploitation. This has happened historically over much of the original range. On the other hand, beavers are relatively long-lived and once a population is established, they can spread quickly over large areas. To prevent overpopulation and subsequent problems, from one-third to one-half of the population must be harvested annually. Fur trappers normally conduct this harvest during a regulated season. When fur prices are sufficiently high this system functions well, but low prices reduce trapper incentive and necessitate culling by other means.

POPULATION MANAGEMENT

The primary objective of beaver population management is to maintain healthy, productive populations at levels compatible with integrated resources management of the respective watershed. This necessitates the following:

1. Annual population census.
2. Annual assessment of sex ratios, age structure and reproductive rates.
3. Ascertaining the annual number of problems, their location and type.
4. Using the preceding to set trapping seasons to harvest the resource on an annual sustained yield basis.

CURRENT STATUS, VALUES AND PROBLEMS

Beavers are protected under the Wildlife Conservation Act as *Furbearing Animals*. They are managed not only for their fur, but also as wetland developers. Beaver impoundments provide significant wetland habitat for a variety of waterfowl, aquatic mammals, fish, amphibians and countless invertebrates. They provide all the positive values that accrue from wetlands.

Conversely, problems develop when beavers block road culverts or flood wood roads, fields or managed woodlots. In such instances mitigative measures are called for, such as fencing and pipes. Removal of the colony may ultimately be warranted.

Too many beaver impoundments in a watershed can inhibit anadromous fish migration, reduce spawning habitat and contribute to higher stream temperatures. On the other hand, beaver impoundments provide nursery and growth areas for young trout and opportunities for sport fishing. This perceived conflict with salmonid habitat and the increasing interest shown by wildlife organizations to restore streams for fish, necessitates the development of a policy to address the issue.

POLICY

HABITAT IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS

Beavers should be managed on a watershed basis. Each watershed should be assessed regarding its suitability as beaver habitat and the impact of beaver impoundments on fish habitat.

OPERATIONAL POLICY

- ***Groups wishing to work on fish habitat improvement projects will be required to submit a management plan on a suitable base map indicating the section of stream to be managed, obstructions (specifying beaver dams) they intend to remove and the manner of handling them.***
- All Watershed Management plans must be submitted to the Wildlife Division, Department of Environment, Energy and Forestry, for approval.
- Management plans must include areas within the watershed to accommodate beavers and will be revised as conditions dictate.
- Permits issued by the Department will be required to remove active and abandoned dams and resident beavers.
- The Department will provide expertise to interested groups in the development of an acceptable management plan.

NUISANCE BEAVER

The Department will continue to address all nuisance beaver complaints.

PRIVATE LAND

Each complaint will be inspected and appropriate action will be taken based on the nature and extent of the problem. **Beaver Problem Occurrence Reports** will be filed for each complaint to ensure follow-up and further action if necessary.

PUBLIC LAND

Highways

The Department of Transportation and Public Works and the Department of Environment, Energy and Forestry have a shared responsibility for handling beaver problems that occur on public roads and have agreed to work jointly to solve them.

- A permanent committee has been established to deal with beaver problems affecting highways.
- The committee is comprised of personnel from the Department of Transportation and Public Works and the Department of Environment, Energy and Forestry, Wildlife Division.
- The committee meets twice annually (April and October) to assess problems and recommend action.

Roles and responsibilities of the two departments are defined in an operational policy as follows:

- The Department of Environment, Energy and Forestry will provide training to the Department of Transportation and Public Works highway crews on techniques used to mitigate beaver problems, proper use of the equipment and maintenance required.
- Department of Transportation and Public Works will insure that all beaver problem areas are checked in late April or early May to document and map active problems, clean or replace old fences, and install new fences or pipes where required.
- Department of Transportation and Public Works will check all fences weekly for new activity at inactive sites and maintain and clean fences at active sites. Checks will continue through late November or until freeze-up occurs.
- Active areas will be managed to accommodate beavers where possible.
- In areas where beavers cannot be accommodated, the Department of Environment, Energy and Forestry will be responsible for removing the animals.
- The Department of Transportation and Public Works will seek the advice of the Department of

Environment, Energy and Forestry prior to removal and replacement of beaver fences, beaver pipes, or any alternations made to the site. This will insure problems are not compounded if fences are removed and not immediately replaced. Department of Environment, Energy and Forestry staff will be available to provide advice and assistance to crews encountering difficulties.

- Department of Transportation and Public Works will adjust hiring practices to insure adequate personnel are available from late April through late November in districts prone to problems. A crew of two or three will be required for each area.
- After September 30th, the Department of Transportation and Public Works will designate employees, East and West, to insure control structures are maintained (fences and pipes cleaned) and assess the effectiveness of structures.
- Committee representatives will ensure that their crews are aware of problems, appropriate action taken, and that structures are serviced and maintained on a regular basis. All crews will be equipped with a pair of chest waders, hack, wire cutters, and any additional tools deemed necessary for the job.

Land Under Forest Management

The Department of Environment, Energy and Forestry will continue to work with the Department of Agriculture and Forestry in handling beaver induced flooding of managed woodlots and access roads. Each complaint will be inspected and appropriate action taken. Based on the nature and extent of the problem, **Beaver Problem Occurrence Reports** will be filed for each complaint to insure follow-up and further action if necessary.

For further information:

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