

Hi Everyone,

I was asked by Bill to give insight into controlling beaver populations and also insight into coexisting with them as well. My knowledge of beavers comes through my experience trapping them, and studying them.

First off beavers are colony animals, meaning they reside in family groups. The young typically live in the same location as the adult for 2 years before being forced out of the area. Upon being forced out the 2 year old beavers will have to claim their own territory. This usually means they will build a new lodge (beaver house) in a different part of the lake or river. They can also burrow into a shoreline and live underground. This is called a "bank den". When building new lodges they cut down a lot of trees and saplings near the shoreline to use as building material. When the lodges are complete they are impenetrable to predators. When humans try to remove these it usually requires large equipment or explosives. A beaver lodge that is left unoccupied by beavers will remain for well over 10 years if not washed away by flooding or removed by humans. Other than providing a place to live for the beavers the lodges can be great habitat for dozens of additional animal species to benefit from, fish included.

Some of the things that are seen as negatives towards beavers are that they cut down trees along properties. When a beaver is building a house it won't discriminate between tree species for material and regularly drop trees bigger than 2 ft in diameter. When looking for food they will select young poplar, aspen, birch or willow trees first then move to whatever's left in the area. It can be expensive to replace trees especially with the chance of being cut down again. I've seen beavers travel over 100 yards inland to cut down a nice looking birch tree. Another negative is the bank dens I mentioned above. These dens are created by the beavers digging an underwater tunnel into the bank that have a tendency to collapse from above. Once collapsed they leave a divot on the surface damaging the shoreline and leaving a spot for more potential erosion. These can be costly to fix as well.

In my opinion the best way to co exist with beavers is to manage the population to a level that the lake can support. What I mean by this is the shoreline can only grow a certain amount of new saplings for food each year. If the beaver population is too high they will eat through a lot of the food quickly forcing them to move inland to bigger trees. If the population is managed at a lower level there is plenty of new sapling growth to feed the population preventing them from seeking bigger trees as often. Also expanding populations will require the beavers to need a lot of new material for the new lodges and they will clear cut much of the area around the spot they decide to build.

If left alone the beaver population will reach a maximum capacity and control themselves through disease and the fight for territory. It is possible to co exist and let the populations manage themselves. To prevent the loss of trees the land owner should wrap the base of each desired tree with 2-3ft high of metal hardware mesh. This will prevent the beavers from chewing

through. Remember to yearly adjust the hardware mesh as the tree grows or it will girdle and kill the tree as well.

Trapping if done by an experienced trapper is the best way to control beaver populations. It is an effective method for removing a selected number of animals from the population while leaving the rest to continue to thrive. An experienced trapper will be able to estimate the population of beavers living in an area and be able to distinguish between adults and young beavers. This is important to ensure that they know when to stop if the desired outcome is to maintain a certain population. If beavers are targeted by an inexperienced trapper or landowner they can become "trap shy". This means that the traps weren't placed correctly and the beaver escapes. Once a beaver becomes trap shy it becomes very difficult to catch because it now knows what the traps look like.

If you have additional questions about beavers please let me know.

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Or text 608-472-1940 and I can give you a call.