

MERRIMACK CONSERVATION COMMISSION

BEAVER MANAGEMENT POLICY

REVISED 3/25/2002

BACKGROUND

It is believed that beaver have inhabited much of New England beginning at the end of the last ice age and the subsequent re-emergence of forested lands. During colonial times, vast amounts of forestland were cleared for agricultural pursuits, ship building and other building materials. This clearing activity combined with beaver trapping drove the beaver population into more remote regions that were less influenced by man.

Because of declining agricultural operations over the last hundred years, forests have returned to a place of prominence in the state. Along with this return, a burgeoning beaver population has developed in urban areas and consequently an increasing number of complaints are being received at various town offices. This may rightly be viewed as a classic confrontation between man and nature. Ironically, the cycle is repeating itself and beavers are once again under pressure to give way to man. Rather than clearing land for agriculture, the forests are being eliminated because of commerce, industry, roads and housing developments, which today we call "urban sprawl." Beavers are not doing anything that they have not done for thousands of years. However, where there is conflict, the beaver's activities are often viewed as a nuisance and occasionally can raise health concerns.

One of the responsibilities of the Conservation Commission is to educate the public about the preservation of wildlife and habitat. However, solving neighborhood problems caused by the activities of beavers can appear to go against conservation and can create a larger, negative image that can cause misunderstandings and a breakdown in communication. The Beaver Management Policy set forth below is intended to provide guidelines for balancing the beaver's needs with those of man.

POLICY

Goal: Beaver and their habitat found in the Town of Merrimack shall be protected to the fullest extent possible and will be controlled through the use of sound wildlife management techniques consistent with State law.

A. Objective: To share responsibility for the control and management of beaver by the private and public sector.

1. Beaver and the effects of their activity, including felling trees, building dams and lodges and flooding of adjacent land, are presumed to be the responsibility of the landowner(s) on whose land the activity occurs.

2. Except when public improvements are either damaged by floodwater or are threatened by rising water that is caused by beaver activity, the Town shall not enter upon private property to control beaver or curtail their activity.
3. Where public improvements are being damaged by impounded water and it is necessary to enter upon private property to take steps necessary to secure said improvements, Town representatives shall first make reasonable efforts to contact the property owner(s) prior to entry. When public improvements are being threatened by rising water, Town representatives shall first consult with the landowner(s) prior to taking any action.
4. When improvements on private property are being damaged by flood water or are being threatened by rising water as a result of beaver activity occurring on Town-owned property, the Town shall take steps as necessary to protect said private improvements.
5. Except when an emergency condition exists, where it is necessary to control beaver activity on Town-owned property to protect improvements on private land, the “least-impact” approach shall be followed and may consist of the following:
 - Water level control devices may be installed.
 - If water level control devices prove ineffective or inappropriate, the beaver dam or other obstruction may be breached to reduce the water level. If practical, only a portion of the obstruction shall be breached which facilitates the lowering of water level necessary to secure private improvements.
 - Beaver may be trapped on an annual basis on Town-owned properties, to maintain a stable population in these areas.
 - Activities undertaken which affect beaver and their habitat, including but not limited to, reducing impoundment water levels, removing dams, trapping or destroying beaver and other such similar activities shall be conducted pursuant to local, state and federal laws which regulate these animals and their habitats.
6. All costs incurred to control beaver and their activity that occurs on private property shall be borne by the landowner(s).
7. All costs associated with the control of beaver and their activity that occurs on private land that impacts or threatens public improvements shall be borne by the Town. The appropriate Town department shall make the final decision as to whether a threat exists to public improvements.
8. Except when an emergency condition exists, the Town department responsible for identifying a beaver-related problem will provide written notice of the problem to the Conservation Commission. The Conservation Commission will address the issue at its next regularly scheduled meeting and make a “determination of responsibility.” The Conservation Commission may recommend that the Town department take appropriate corrective action(s) which may entail the removal of beaver by various trapping techniques; the removal of obstructions; and the installation of beaver pipes or similar control structures. The Conservation Commission may determine that the problem is the responsibility of the Town and may engage the services of a licensed trapper to control or

eliminate the beaver problem. The Conservation Commission may determine that the problem is the responsibility of the landowner and that no action by the Town is appropriate. .

9. Except when an emergency condition exists, hand labor is preferred over the use of backhoes, excavators and the like, to avoid unnecessary environmental damage resulting from the control of beaver and their activity.
10. Where beaver activity are impacting the capacity of a culvert as determined by the Department of Public Works, the Conservation Commission shall conduct, or direct Public Works to conduct, those actions that are required to maintain the drainage courses. These activities may include, but not be limited to, removal of obstructions, relocation of the beaver by live trapping, or destruction of the beaver by conventional trapping procedures. Whenever possible, debris shall be removed from the site.

B. Objective: To maintain and provide current information for the public and Town Officials regarding the management of beaver and their habitat.

1. The Conservation Commission shall maintain a list of local, state and federal departments and personnel, including licensed trappers, where the public and Town Officials/Departments may obtain further information and assistance regarding the management of beaver.
2. The Conservation Commission shall upon request provide to the public, Town Officials/Departments and others, a packet of information containing current local and state laws pertaining to beaver; a list of licensed trappers, and state and federal agencies involved in beaver management and other information that may be added from time to time.

C. Objective: To mitigate the building of beaver structures and potential flooding of Town-owned lands.

1. Upon receiving a formal complaint regarding nuisance beaver activity on Town-owned lands, the Conservation Commission shall evaluate the effect on the site and other abutting parcels; examine detailed site map (s) and visit the site to determine the scope of the issue.
2. Regarding mitigation, the Conservation Commission shall consider the following alternatives:
 - Taking no action;
 - Installing properly designed “beaver pipes;”
 - Removing the beaver dam which may require a wetlands permit;
 - Relocation of the beaver by live trapping; and
 - Removal of the beaver by conventional trapping procedures.

4. The Conservation Commission shall consider and attempt all available and feasible alternatives prior to having the beaver removed by conventional trapping procedures.
5. Mitigation procedures shall be protective of domestic animals (pets) and children.