



## Beavers Northwest

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### Whidbey Island Conservation District Living with Beavers Questions

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For more information, please visit the Beavers Northwest website: [www.beaversnw.org](http://www.beaversnw.org)

*Why would a beaver take down a large tree, but not eat it?*

Beavers fell trees for a number of reasons. They do eat the bark and the cambium (the layer just underneath the bark). If they fell a large tree, they may strip the branches from the tree to eat the more tender and easier to access branches. They may also be using the tree (or its branches) to build their dam or lodge. Sometimes beavers will even fell trees just to make more space and light for other species that they prefer to eat more.

*Why do beavers partially gnaw on a tree, then give up?*

Beavers will often work part way through a tree. They may chew part way and then hope that the weakened tree will fall at a later time. Beavers are also known to girdle trees or chew partially through/around them to kill the tree. This may allow more light into an area so that other preferred beaver forage plants can grow.

*Does a trapper need to get permission from a property owner to trap beaver on their property?*

Yes. Trappers must be registered with WDFW and get permission from property owners to place traps on private property. See the WDFW regulations here: <https://wdfw.wa.gov/publications/02012/wdfw02012.pdf>

*Would beavers be bothered by blue-green algae?*

Beavers are resilient and tend to inhabit all kinds of water bodies including roadside ditches and urban streams. That being said, they do drink the water that they live in and can be affected by toxins. I was unable to find any direct research about the effects of cyanobacteria on beaver health, but it is known to harm humans and dogs if ingested so it likely also has an effect on beavers.

*How many beaver lodges does a specific area support? (Rather, how many lodges might one find in a specific acre)?*

Beavers live in colony groups from 1-20 beavers in one area. They will typically have one or more living spaces (this could be a lodge or a bank den). Sometimes, colonies will have more than one lodge. These may be summer/winter lodges or high flow/low flow lodges. There may also be inactive lodges at a site that the beavers have abandoned for any number of reasons. Beavers are territorial, but beaver density depends heavily on a number of factors including but not limited to site conditions, food availability, and predator pressure. It is also believed that beavers may be more tolerant of their own family groups. So a large wetland system may include multiple generations in a big extended beaver family.

*What are the benefits of beavers to lowlands like Whidbey Island?*

Beaver dams provide many benefits to water quality and habitat. The wetlands created by beavers create great fish habitat providing refuge and foraging area for juvenile fish. The wetlands also increase biodiversity bringing in more macroinvertebrates, mammals, amphibians and birds. Beaver ponds can also store water and buffer flooding from peak storm events. Their benefits are manifold! While many of these benefits are amplified in upper watersheds, they can still have a positive impact in the lowlands.



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*In a lowland area like Whidbey Island, how might one encourage a beaver to create a lodge in a specific area and deter them from another area where you'd like to utilize that for other purposes?*

Exclusion fencing is the best way to keep beavers out of an area but it is by no means foolproof. Beavers are good diggers, so any fencing needs to either have a bottom or extend into the ground. I've also heard of folks using bear urine (or some other predator scent) to deter beavers from an area.

Encouraging beavers to build a lodge in a specific place is tough. I think your best bet is excluding them (or discouraging them) from the places you don't want them and then they'll find their own place to build a new lodge.

Dams can be encouraged in specific places by building Beaver Dam Analogues. Here's an article about their use in restoration: <http://www.sciencemag.org/news/2018/06/beaver-dams-without-beavers-artificial-logjams-are-popular-controversial-restoration>