

## Your neighborhood beaver: Friend or Foe?

The mention of beavers usually elicits strong reactions from landowners. Some live next to a lake created by a beaver dam and want to make sure beavers maintain their dam and keep the lake's water level consistent. Others are concerned about downed trees and flooded yards or fields. The truth is that beavers provide many benefits to our landscape, but at times, they can also create situations we're not willing to live with.

### Benefits to Other Creatures

Beavers create dams across streams and rivers to flood the area surrounding their lodge. This protects them from predators and wets nearby soils to promote the growth of their favorite (water-loving) plants, such as willows. These beaver ponds and their associated wetlands also provide food and shelter for many other kinds of wildlife -- herons, ducks, deer, elk, weasels, raccoons and various species of fish.

Salmon are heavily dependent on beavers as their ponds create the ideal place for young juveniles to hide from predators and feed as they grow into sub-adults. Beaver dams rarely block the upstream migration of adult salmon. The fish wait until a heavy rain raises the water level which allows them to swim over the dam and continue upstream.

### Benefits to People

On a much larger scale, beavers also provide many benefits to the landscape and to humans. Historically, it's estimated there were between 10 and 70 beavers per square mile across North America. A recent study of the Stillaguamish River system estimates

our streams once held about ten beaver ponds per mile. These abundant ponds and wetlands stored extra water during rain storms and snowmelt events. Much of this stored water then soaked into the soil and recharged our groundwater supplies.

Over time, changes to the landscape, including the loss of wetlands and the removal of forests and beaver dams, have resulted in more frequent flooding and higher water levels than in the past. These more aggressive floods not only cause damage to private property, but they also damage or destroy important feeding, nesting and hiding habitat for fish and wildlife.



## How to Co-exist with Beavers

When landowners ask me what they can do to improve the health of their stream or river, I tell them “slow the water down.” One of the best ways to do that is to leave beaver dams intact on your property. Leaving beavers and their dams alone, however, is not always an option landowners are willing to live with.

Beavers have voracious appetites that can include felling trees and chewing off shrubs you planted in your yard. Beaver ponds often flood agricultural lands and lower productivity. They can also flood wells and septic drain fields, leading to water pollution and failed septic systems. The good news is that there are ways you can protect your property while allowing beavers to co-exist with you and your family.



If your beaver pond's water level is too high and/or rising, there is a simple device that can be installed to control it called a pond leveler. After choosing a water level you're comfortable with, you install the device and no matter how much beavers try to build up their dam, they are unable to raise the pond's water level. If beavers are plugging up a culvert under a road or your driveway, a device, called a beaver deceiver can be installed to encourage them to build their dam elsewhere.

To install either of these devices, you will need a permit from the Department of Fish and Wildlife, but the cost of the permit and construction supplies

are fairly low. The Conservation District can help you decide if these devices are right for your situation and show you how to construct and install them.

## Removing Beavers

Beaver removal and lethal control are also options. If you trap a beaver, you need a permit from the Department of Fish and Wildlife to relocate it. Research shows, however, that beavers seldom survive this relocation process and surrounding beavers often re-colonize your property. Dam removal and beaver re-location are both illegal if no permit is acquired.

Due to the many benefits beavers provide to our landscape, I encourage you to think about ways you can learn to live with them. This may involve re-thinking the vision you had for your property or landscaping. A natural wetland provides aesthetic beauty to your property and can increase property values. The Conservation District can help you choose plants to beautify your wetland or pond and show you how to protect plants from beavers.

If you are struggling with beaver issues on your property, the District's habitat staff is happy to visit your property at no charge, answer your questions, and help you come up with a solution.



## Learn more

Contact the Habitat Team, at 425-335-5634 or email [habitat@snohomishcd.org](mailto:habitat@snohomishcd.org).

For additional services, contact Beavers Northwest  
[www.beaversnw.org](http://www.beaversnw.org)  
Elyssa Kerr, Programs and Project Manager  
[elyssa.m.k@gmail.com](mailto:elyssa.m.k@gmail.com)