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Beaver Management – Part I Life History and Benefits of Beaver

by *Edward P. Hill*

The role of the beaver in the exploration, development and early economy of North America has been referred to as many times as there are historical accounts of the era. Clearly the beaver and its fur was the most widely and intensively sought natural resource of the continent during the 1700's and 1800's. Trapping and shooting by individuals and organized parties of native Indians and white trappers quickly took their toll. Except for populations along the northern edge of their range and a few isolated populations in the middle and southern latitudes, beaver numbers were decimated before 1900. That such occurred over such a vast area under primitive conditions indicates the vulnerability of the beaver to exploitation, a potential approach to damage control through management.

Beaver populations responded to restocking programs, a decrease in demand for fur, restrictions on the times, methods, and numbers of beaver harvested. Their return to most of their former range has generally been beneficial to wildlife. But beaver activities and the associated flooding and damage often conflicted with human interests.

In colder climates damage occurs primarily during warm months, whereas in milder climates, it may occur throughout the year. Since the major concern is the management of beaver damage, and because control strategies can be applied most effectively during periods free of icing conditions, this article does not address under ice or other winter trapping techniques. The purpose here is to assist individuals, (1) in assessing beaver damage, (2) in determining the need for control, and (3) in the selection of control techniques in ice-free conditions.

Life History of Beaver

Scientific information on the beaver's life history and biology is helpful in understanding their positive and negative attributes. Of greater importance in damage situations is that

scientific information is helpful in assessing the magnitude of damage, in determining if control is appropriate, and in selecting the appropriate approach.

Description

The beaver is North America's largest rodent. Most adults weigh between 35 and 68 pounds (16 to 31.5 kilograms) and may reach 4 feet in length. Their fur color varies locally from dark chestnut, to reddish to yellowish brown above



Beavers cause landowners many problems but provide valuable wildlife habitat.

In this Issue

- **Beaver Management – Part I
Life History and Benefits of Beaver**
by Edward P. Hill
- **Beaver Management – Part II
Damage, Management, and Control Options**
by Edward P. Hill
- **Beaver Management – Part III
Processing Carcass Products for Sale**
by Edward P. Hill
- **Pond Management
Alternative Pond Stocking Strategies**
by Kedric Nutt

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