



## **TOWN OF FOXBOROUGH CONSERVATION COMMISSION**

CONSERVATION DEPARTMENT  
TOWN HALL, 40 SOUTH STREET  
FOXBOROUGH, MA 02035  
508-543-1251

### **BEAVER MANAGEMENT PLAN / POLICY**

Adopted by Foxborough Conservation Commission, January 10, 2022

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Beavers, which were nearly trapped to extinction centuries ago, remain at decreased numbers throughout most of the country. Beavers play an important ecological role in wetlands and riparian (riverfront) areas, where they benefit and enhance groundwater, surface water, floodplain and riparian habitat complexity, and add resilience to changing climate conditions.

This plan/policy was created by the Conservation Commission, in cooperation with the Board of Health, to encourage the use of non-lethal methods of beaver control, rather than trapping and removing problem animals, which should only be done as a last resort.

#### **WHY PROTECT BEAVERS?**

Most people only become aware of beavers when they are a nuisance, but biologists classify beavers as a “Keystone” species because this one species supports thousands of other species. Beaver-created ponds and wetlands are among the most biologically productive ecosystems in the world. Beavers build climate resilience naturally and provide a keystone role in watershed health by creating ponds and wetlands that:

- store surface water and groundwater,
- reduce storm flood damage,
- help to maintain stream flows during droughts,
- reduce wildfire damage and speed recovery,
- increase biodiversity,
- sequester carbon in the soil, and more.

Across North America, many scientists and land managers are discovering that, far from being forces of destruction, beavers can serve as agents of water conservation, habitat creation, and stream restoration. Beaver dams are gaining popularity as a low-tech, low-cost strategy to build climate resiliency at the landscape scale. They slow and store water that can be accessed by vegetation during dry periods, effectively protecting riparian and wetland ecosystems from droughts.

#### **BACKGROUND**

The Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) Guidelines for beaver management mainly deal with emergency situations. If there is a threat to public health or safety, an application for an Emergency Permit to alleviate the immediate threat can be submitted to the Board of Health. If a property owner has a trapping license, they can trap beavers during open season (November 1 – April 15), but an Emergency Permit from the Board of Health is still required during the off-season.

If work involves activities under the Commission’s jurisdiction, an Emergency Permit (valid for 10 days) must also be obtained from the Commission. Any proposed alterations to a wetland resource area, beyond those necessary to alleviate the immediate threat, are still subject to Commission’s review and determination and may require the filing of a Notice of Intent.

Any non-emergency or long-term management proposals that do not constitute a threat to public health, are subject to the approval of the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (DFW).

## **POLICY**

The Conservation Commission is responsible for the protection of wetlands and wildlife under both the Wetlands Protection Act and the Foxborough Wetlands Protection Bylaw. As such, the Commission requires the use of non-lethal methods of beaver control, unless such methods are proven to be ineffective.

A database will be compiled, documenting the areas of known beaver conflicts and the methods of control that are proven effective in these areas. As this database grows, the Commission will create the following three-tiered management overlay: (1) areas where no action is required, (2) areas where non-lethal methods are effective, and (3) no-tolerance areas.

**Category 1** (*no action required*) shall include areas where the topography is such that a beaver dam could never threaten public health or safety, or areas where a beaver dam has clearly been abandoned before creating any threat to public health or safety. An example of such an area would be large expanses of conservation land or town forest.

**Category 2** (*non-lethal methods*) shall include areas where the topography is such that there is or could be a threat to public health and safety, but where a pond leveler or similar device may be effective.

**Category 2 or 3**. Where there is no potential threat to public safety, *but* there is a threat/potential threat to a rare or endangered species, the Commission may consider the location a Category 2 *or* Category 3.

**Category 3** (*no tolerance areas*) shall include areas where the topography is such that there is or could be a threat to public health, but where non-lethal control methods are ineffective, or where the presence of beavers poses a threat to public health regardless of water level, such as in a public water supply.

Two examples of this might be (1) areas where the hydrologic head at a dam is too small for a pond leveler to be effective, and (2) areas where an impoundment has reached within 200 feet of a Town Well, creating the potential for contamination.

**For a Category 3 location**, the Commission *may* authorize the licensed trapping of beavers or the permanent breaching of a dam on a non-emergency basis, so long as certain conditions are met.

Dam breaching, if authorized, must be done incrementally to avoid downstream flooding and erosion.

Licensed trappers must use non-lethal box or cage-type traps and beavers must be killed humanely (*i.e. with a bullet*).

Habitat Management, as a long-term solution, as required by the Commission may include, but is not limited to: fencing around trees, planting vegetation that is not a preferred food source, and removing vegetation that is a highly desirable food source for beavers. The property owner is responsible for maintaining the required Habitat Management practices, except in situations where the Town has specifically accepted responsibility for beaver management.

This Beaver Management Plan does not supersede Foxborough's Ch. 267 Regulations or M.G.L. Ch. 131, § 80A. All determinations and actions by the Town of Foxborough must comply with the requirements set out in the above laws.

Several guidance documents are available online under the MassDEP's Wetlands Guidance section at: <https://www.mass.gov/lists/water-resources-policies-guidance#wetlands-> .

For additional facts and information about beaver biology and how to deal with them, please visit Beaver Solutions' website at <https://www.beaverinstitute.org/> .