



A Place for Beavers

By Rebecca Willison

Love 'em or hate 'em, the North American Beaver (*Castor canadensis*) has influenced the history of Canada more than any other animal. Considered the civil engineers of the animal kingdom, beavers are a keystone species in our forested ecosystems.

Beavers play a vital role by creating pond and wetland habitat that many species of animals, birds and insects depend upon. These ponds and wetlands act as reservoirs, keeping downstream water levels more constant by reducing flooding in the spring and increasing stream flow during the dry summer months. Water quality is also improved as nutrients and sediments suspended in water running off nearby upland areas are trapped and filtered out before they can enter downstream lakes and rivers.

But the benefits of beavers may be overshadowed when they take up residence on or near your property. Worrying about flooding or losing trees can lead to many sleepless nights. So what can you do about it?

As a landowner, you have two choices when dealing with beavers on your property: share your property by learning how to co-exist with beavers or take steps to remove them. Removing beavers from your property is often only a short-term solution.

The Muskoka Watershed Council has developed a Stewardship Guide outlining different options available when dealing with beavers, including options for co-existing with them.

Observe and enjoy

Allow the beavers on your property to live undisturbed and watch the natural cycle of a beaver pond and the wildlife that are dependent on this wetland environment.

Prevent issues

- When planting trees, select species that are not favoured by beavers and place plants you care about away from known beaver trails to limit losses. Beavers avoid conifer trees such as Red and White Pine, White and Black Spruce, and Hemlock.
- If removing trees from other areas, place species favoured by beavers where they can easily access it to provide them with alternate sources of food and building material. Beavers typically prefer deciduous trees, especially Trembling Aspen, Poplar, Willow and Birch.
- Plant Poplar and other fast growing species favoured by beavers within easy reach of the beavers to provide food and building material into the future.

Protect your shoreline and shoreline structures

- Wrap galvanized welded wire fencing around flotation blocks and wooden supports to prevent beavers from using your dock as a roof or digging into the Styrofoam flotation material for a lodge.
- Stake galvanized welded wire fencing along the water line at earthen dikes to discourage burrowing into the bank.

Protecting your trees

- Wrap individual trees in metre-high galvanized welded wire fencing, heavy mesh hardware cloth, or a few layers of chicken wire. Leave 6 inches of space between the fencing and the tree and hold in place using stakes or rocks.
- Protect areas of trees by installing 1.5 metre-high fencing around the area ensuring that the bottom of the fence is flush to the ground to prevent beavers from burrowing underneath.

There are also a number of structures that can be used to protect culverts from being blocked (trapezoidal fences) or to regulate water levels in ponds to prevent flooding above beaver dams (beaver bafflers or Clemson Beaver Pond Levelers).

Beavers are an integral component of our environment. Any effort that you as a landowner can take to co-exist with the beavers on your property will benefit you as well as the rest of your watershed.