

How to Control Problem Beavers and Dismantle Beaver Dams

Best Practices Guide - Outaouais Region

Beavers are found in most areas of Quebec. The beaver is well known for its ability to alter the landscape and the flow of water by building dams. Periodically, these dams can threaten man-made infrastructure or flood private land. To mitigate the impact of beaver dams, it can be necessary to take preventative measures and - sometimes - to relocate, frighten away, or even eliminate problem beavers and to destroy their dams. However, care must be exercised when taking such action as doing so can modify fish habitat, adversely affect downstream property owners, and destroy wildlife habitat and human property.

The purpose of this guide is to inform you of your responsibilities when considering or undertaking measures to address beaver-related problems. No matter what advice is presented in this document, be aware that this guide does not exempt you from complying with wildlife regulations such as the “Law regarding the Conservation and Enhancement of Wildlife”, the “Regulation regarding Wildlife Habitat”, the “Fisheries Law”, or any other applicable regulation. Failure to follow the instructions in this guide may, therefore, result in prosecution and fines.

Guidelines to Follow:

1. There are various intervention techniques that can help prevent the damage caused by beavers. Some of them aim at preventing the beaver from constructing its dam too close to existing infrastructure or at controlling the level of water in a beaver pond. These techniques are detailed in the “Guide for the Development and Management of Territory used by Beavers in Quebec” which is published by the Quebec Wildlife Foundation and in the “Problem Beaver Guide” published by the Ministry of Wildlife and Natural Resources and available at www.mrnf.gouv.qc.ca/publications/faune/guide_castor.pdf. Before capturing or killing a beaver, preventative techniques should be applied.
2. The replacement of a culvert with one having a larger diameter can provide a sensible solution as long as the new culvert does not enlarge the bed of the stream. Apparently, beavers are less inclined to block a culvert with a large diameter. Also, to avoid damage caused by beavers, it may be best to: move the infrastructure that could be affected (eg: a pathway or a dock); maintain conifers along the shoreline; and protect the trunks of deciduous trees with a wire cage. In certain cases, it is best to avoid harvesting trees within 60 meters of the waterway in order to avoid the growth of young trees which attract beavers.
3. When the conservation of a beaver dam is not feasible, it is possible to dismantle it. However, depending on the circumstances, such action may require an SEG permit. If there has been property damage and all attempts at preventing the animal from causing such damage have been unsuccessful, it is possible to proceed with the dismantling of a dam without an SEG permit whether the dam is located on public or private land. In an emergency situation, that is, when there is fear of a disaster, it is possible to proceed with the dismantling without an SEG permit. However, if the

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dismantling of the dam is being done as a preventative measure and attempts to stop the animal from causing property damage have been unsuccessful, an SEG permit is required before the dam can be dismantled whether it is on public or private land.

4. Before starting to dismantle a beaver dam, you must trap all the beavers that frequent it. To do so, it is recommended that you use a lethal trap that has been certified in accordance with the requirements of the International Agreement on Humane Trapping (see <http://www.mrnf.gouv.qc.ca/publications/enligne/faune/reglementation-piegeage/pdf/pieges-ANIPSC.pdf>). Various techniques for trapping beavers are detailed in the guide entitled “The Trapping and Management of Fur Bearing Animals” published by the Quebec Federation of Trapping Managers (1998). Given the complexity of this practice, it is recommended that you enlist the assistance of a professional trapper. To locate the professional trappers servicing your area, please contact the Quebec Federation of Trapping Managers at 1-866-260-7644 or at www.ftgq.qc.ca.
5. An SEG permit is not required if the trapping of a beaver is done in conjunction with a dam being dismantled in response to property damage. However, such a permit is required from the Ministry of Wildlife and Natural Resources when a dam is to be dismantled as a preventative measure.
6. The remains of exterminated beavers must be disposed of outside the high water limit and in conformity with all applicable laws and regulations.
7. If other animals are trapped as part of the dismantling process, these animals must be set free. Any animals subject to mandatory reporting who are killed or injured during this process must either be delivered or declared to a conservation officer.
8. If trapping devices are used outside of the trapping season, the name of the property owner or the person in authority should be clearly marked on such devices. This will allow conservation officers to trace the owner in the event of a complaint.
9. In all cases, the responsibility for any work undertaken remains that of the property owner or the person in authority. This is the case even if the work is done by a third party on behalf of the property owner or the person in authority.
10. Before dismantling a dam, the person responsible must ensure that no other beaver or man-made dam is situated downstream so as to avoid a domino effect. He/she must also ensure that no downstream infrastructure (cottage, dock, roadway, etc) or aquatic wildlife development facility will be affected.
11. In the case where there are several dams causing property damage, they must be dismantled from downstream to upstream.

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12. The dismantling of a beaver dam must be started by breaching the dam. To avoid erosion of the shoreline and flooding of adjacent properties, the width of the initial breach must not be greater than that of the original water channel and/or that of the culvert downstream from the dam. In addition, the breach must be made at the place where the water originally flowed. Once the water level is the same on both sides of the dam, the remaining parts of the dam can be progressively dismantled.
13. The debris from the breach and from the dismantling must be disposed of outside of both the high water limit and the wetlands.
14. Preferably, the dismantling of a beaver dam should be done manually and during the dry season. It is possible to use heavy equipment but only if certain conditions are met (see paragraphs 15 and 16 below). Because waterways are generally home to fish, all dismantling operations must aim at minimizing the impact on this type of habitat.
15. The movement of heavy equipment is limited to the shoreline. Roads, cut lines, or existing trails should be used so as not to disturb the vegetation and soil. The movement of equipment along the water bed is prohibited. Therefore, all work must be done on the dry part of the shoreline. The digging, dredging and/or diversion of waterways is prohibited.
16. The handling of oil, lubricants, and gas must be done at least 15 metres from the high water line. Machinery must be washed at least 15 meters from the high water line before their use and in such a way as to prevent the deposit of grease or oil within the work zone. The equipment must be in good working order and must not leak any oil or gas. To this end, the machinery and equipment must be regularly inspected and properly maintained. As soon as a problem is detected, corrective action must be taken and maintenance carried out immediately.
17. An emergency response kit as well as sufficient quantities of recognized absorbents must always be available on site to deal with petroleum spills. Any spill or accident that could harm the environment must be reported immediately to Quebec's Environmental Emergency hotline at 1-866-694-545 or 1-888-626-6663 ext 3239. All oil and contaminated soil will have to be recovered by a specialized firm.
18. The dismantling of dams should be effected between 15 July and 1 October so as to avoid the periods in which fish spawn and develop. However, in the event of an emergency, a beaver dam can be dismantled at any time. An emergency comprises any situation in which the immediate dismantling of a dam is required to prevent property damage or to ensure public safety.
19. Before beginning any work, be sure to notify the local municipality.

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20. When advised that there is a beaver dam threatening public security or property, the MRC is responsible for effecting all work required to reestablish the normal flow of a waterway.
21. It is important to note that if a beaver dam creates a pond that covers an area greater than one hectare, its dismantlement requires specific authorization. In such cases, contact the local office of the Ministry of Wildlife and Natural Resources' Directorate of Integrated Operations.