

Beaver Management Guidelines 2013.11.25

Beavers and dams may need to be removed periodically to protect, maintain or build infrastructure, or to avoid the flooding of private and public land. Removal is normally accomplished using hand tools.

Removal of beaver dams can negatively affect fish and fish habitat by de-watering the upstream pond, stranding fish and releasing sediment and large volumes of water (that can be devoid of oxygen, particularly in winter) downstream. It is therefore important to exercise extreme caution when proceeding with dam removal due to the possibility of downstream flooding and damage and the re-entry of dam material into the water body. The breaching or removal of a beaver dam in most cases does not prevent future beaver activity in the area.

The removal of the dam should not adversely affect a fishery, or recreational property uses that depend on the dam's existence, both upstream and downstream, The removal activities must be limited to removing or breaching the beaver dam itself and not involve channel, bed of creek or shoreline modification (e.g., widening, straightening, ditching, etc.),

RVCA recommends hiring a licensed trapper to remove beavers and breach dams. See MNR nuisance trappers list.

Timing Windows (best management practices)

The purpose of these timing windows is to allow an appropriate time and stress-free environment for fish to spawn and raise their young in our local lakes and streams. The timing windows are researched and set by the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources staff who have the mandate to set, enforce and allow exceptions or extensions. Beaver dam removal can affect fish and fish habitat by disturbing the sediment that has accumulated behind the dam and can increase the flows downstream.

Timing Windows are as follows: (no dam removal during these times except emergency situations)

- warm water fish communities: from March 15 to June 30
- mixed fish communities: from October 1 to June 30 (e.g. Big Rideau Lake)
- cold-water fish communities: October 1 to May 31
- Ottawa River communities: March 15 to July 15

The release of sediment into the water can stress fish and reduce their chances of survival in the following ways:

- reduce spawning success by smothering the eggs and preventing them from hatching

- inhibit young fish's ability to see prey and feed properly
- suffocate young and adult fish
- inhibit movement and migration of fish
- change water temperature
- reduce water quality.

Beaver dam removal is preferably not done in the winter when the pond is frozen.

This may result in losses of habitat for overwintering fish, turtles and amphibians in the upstream pond and the discharge of water devoid of oxygen downstream.

Remove the dam gradually to allow the water to release slowly and prevent sediment at the bottom of the pond from being released downstream.

As the water levels drop in the upstream pond, increase the size of the opening to drain the pond to the desired level.

The width of the breach opening of the beaver dam should not exceed the width of the original stream channel to prevent bank erosion and flooding of adjacent properties.

When a series of dams is to be removed, this should be done from downstream to upstream in order to avoid severe flooding and damage to fish habitat.

For information on the timing window restrictions in your area, call Jennifer Lamoureux, RVCA Biologist at (613) 692-3571 ext 1108 (1-800-267-3504 ext 1108) or the MNR Area Biologist (Kemptville) at (613) 258-8214 or MNR Kingston (613) 531-5700.