

Restoring Beavers for Montana's Watershed Health: Montana Beaver Action Plan

Created by the Montana Beaver Working Group 2023 Update and Revision



Photo Credit: Torrey Ritter

Executive Summary

The Montana Beaver Action Plan offers applied direction to advance work with beavers for resilient, healthy watersheds. The Plan's overall goals, guiding strategies, and specific actions are developed through collaborative, ongoing conversation among members of the Montana Beaver Working Group. The Montana Beaver Working Group is made up of a wide diversity of stakeholders from across Montana who are working on various aspects of policy, science, education, and management.

In March 2023, over 30 participants gathered in Butte, MT to revise the Montana Beaver Action Plan. Participants engaged in immersive work over two days to update the Plan thanks to generous support from the Broad Reach Fund as well as a dedicated planning team including the National Wildlife Federation, Clark Fork Coalition, Montana Natural Heritage Program, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, World Wildlife Fund, Bureau of Land Management, and restoration ecologist Amy Chadwick. Karen Filipovich facilitated the meeting and worked with breakout groups to shape language and commitments for specific goals, strategies, and actions. The meeting was marked by increased effort to simplify, consolidate, and activate the Plan's vision for the next three years.

The 2023 revision and update of the Montana Beaver Action Plan reflects the contributions of participants at the March 2023 meeting, as well as additional information gathered in a pre-meeting survey. The items offered here do not represent the positions of the participants' employers or affiliated organizations, but rather capture the key ideas developed by individuals in the 2020, 2021, and 2023 workshops, meetings, and follow-up communications.



Photo Credit: Torrey Ritter

GOAL 1: Integrate and expand beaver in the design and approach of stream and wetland restoration.		
Strategy 1.1: Identify and prioritize beaver-related restoration opportunities.		
Action	Partners	Contact
Conduct a statewide beaver dam census using remote sensing.	FWP	Torrey Ritter, FWP
Complete white paper that provides a comprehensive overview of the beaver's keystone role in Montana, including impact on Species of Greatest Conservation Need.	MTNHP, FWP	Torrey Ritter, FWP
Work with partners to develop accessible version of the Beaver Restoration Assessment Tool, complemented with additional layers including: a) beaver dam census; b) conflict hotspots; c) on-the-ground survey efforts, d) Riparian Condition Assessment Tool, Wetland Evaluation Tool, e) Lidar, and additional beaver habitat models.	MTNHP, FWP	Torrey Ritter, FWP
Define expected outcomes of beaver restoration based on ecological settings (i.e. literature review, flow chart).	FWP, NWF	Torrey Ritter, FWP

Strategy 1.2: Seek consensus-based outcomes that address fish and wildlife managers' concerns with beaver-related restoration.		
Action	Partners	Contact
Hold joint meetings in Spring 2024 with fisheries and wildlife biologists to flesh out concerns, monitoring standards, and common language.	FWP, NWF	Torrey Ritter, FWP
Collaborate with research and monitoring partners to develop core questions, answer them with rigorous science methods, and share the results.	UM, MSU, NWF	Torrey Ritter, FWP
Continue expansion of Montana Beaver Conflict Resolution Program from FWP Region 2 (2019) to Region 3 (2024) and Region 4 (2024).	NWF, FWP	Shelby Weigand, NWF

Strategy 1.3 Develop beaver-related restoration networking opportunities for public land managers to seek funding, forge partnerships, and advance restoration.		
Action	Partners	Contact
Develop list of researchers working on beaver topics and specific interests including monitoring. Include locations of research and brief summaries of their research questions.	TU, NWF	Christine Brissette, TU Rob Rich, NWF
Convene a Montana-based meeting of leading beaver researchers and restoration experts in the American West to focus on prioritization, monitoring, and project mapping/sharing.	NWF	Shelby Weigand, NWF
Create subgroup(s) to secure funding, develop structure, and create content for web-based dashboard, which will consolidate beaver-related restoration project information: a) Library of MT-relevant learning resources, with internal BWG access to edit; b) Interactive map of projects and actions on beaver-related restoration; c) Events calendar with volunteer and learning opportunities; d) Statistics/metrics page showing collective impact of beaver-related restoration; e) archived BWG newsletters.; f) show the “before and after” successes of projects (e.g., documentations of drone flights, riparian expansion, sediment movement, etc.); g) file/resource sharing procedures to facilitate contributions.	NWF	Shelby Weigand, NWF

Support interagency coordination meetings on complementary projects to promote synergy among efforts in the Montana Beaver Working Group and various stakeholders.	NWF, MWCC, FWP, BLM, USFWS, USFS	Shelby Weigand, NWF
Convene the Montana BWG twice each year.	NWF	Shelby Weigand, NWF
Develop BWG charter and mission statement with language indicating the Group's intent to be open to, and inclusive of, all individuals, groups, and communities with a shared interest in beaver-related restoration in Montana.	NWF	Shelby Weigand, NWF

GOAL 2: Restore beaver-modified public lands to sustain ecological processes, support biodiversity, and build resilience to drought, wildfires, and flooding.

Strategy 2.1 Integrate beaver-related restoration and conflict mitigation into agency planning for watershed health.

Action	Partners	Contact
Develop sample beaver restoration comment letter for BLM RMP revision.	BHWC	Pedro Marques, BHWC
Support beavers as “management indicator species” on Lolo National Forest (and identify related opportunities).	NWF, BHWC, FWP	Pedro Marques, BHWC Shelby Weigand, NWF Torrey Ritter, FWP
Urge regional Forest Service management towards programmatic NEPA and consultation processes to streamline LTPBR.	BHWC	Pedro Marques, BHWC
Develop model language for Schedule A to streamline restoration projects near US Forest Service Roads and infrastructure.	BHWC	Pedro Marques, BHWC
Support Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem efforts in data collection and feedback tied to beaver-related restoration in critical watersheds affected by wildfire.	GYC	Sierra Harris, GYC

GOAL 3: Provide coordinated education and outreach on the benefits of beavers and beaver-related restoration.		
Strategy 3.1: Create learning opportunities that address watershed-specific goals and motivations for beaver-related restoration.		
Action	Partners	Contact
Create a watershed-based, replicable survey template to gather information on beaver-related restoration at the local level.	NWF	Elissa Chott, NWF
Create a graphic summarizing goals and motivations in different audiences for beaver-related restoration and conflict mitigation.	NWF	Elissa Chott, NWF
Ask local tribes if and how the BWG can support beaver-related restoration in their communities, and provide compensation to tribal community members for the time and resources they spend on BWG efforts.	NWF	Shelby Weigand, NWF

Strategy 3.2: Develop beaver-related restoration resources and stories with consistent, adaptable messaging for target audiences.		
Action	Partners	Contact
Develop three BWG “general public” handouts with room for changeable logos, contact information, etc., depending on the distributor: a) Nonlethal solutions to beaver conflicts (Elissa Chott); b) LTPBR (Autumn Holzgen); c) Land stewardship strategies to complement/encourage beaver-related restoration (Clancy Jandreau, Rob Rich).	NWF, MFP, BC	Elissa Chott, NWF
Create resources that train managers to encourage beaver-related restoration and conflict management in plans and decision-making.	NWF	Elissa Chott, NWF
Create resources that train educators to incorporate beaver-related restoration and conflict management in existing learning curricula.	NWF	Elissa Chott, NWF
Encourage BWG member photo and story contributions in BWG newsletter content.	NWF	Shelby Weigand, NWF Rob Rich, NWF

GOAL 4: Streamline legal and policy obstacles to beaver habitat restoration and relocation of beavers to suitable prioritized habitat.		
Strategy 4.1: Streamline the permitting and administrative processes for beaver-related restoration.		
Action	Partners	Contact
Create a NWP 27 beaver-related restoration guidance document for practitioners.	WWF, TNC, MCC	Aaron Clausen, WWF Kelsey Molloy, TNC Autumn Holzgen, MCC
Talk to DNRC about their guidance document for stream and wetland restoration activities and how it is being incorporated into MT drought management planning.	GYC	Sierra Harris, GYC
Use language from Section Memo 1077 to create a letter from the MT BWG and send to MT state agencies and federal entities that indicate processes already working effectively in other states.	BHWC	Pedro Marques, BHWC

Strategy 4.2: Streamline processes to enable beaver relocation options.		
Action	Partners	Contact
Keep BWG updated on progress of FWP's Environmental Assessment for beaver transplants in the Upper Clark Fork River Basin.	FWP	Torrey Ritter, FWP
Incorporate knowledge and experiences from other states into FWP's future policies and guidance for beaver transplants.	FWP	Torrey Ritter, FWP

Appendix

Contact List

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