

December 2021

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Montana Beaver Working Group

Connecting people and sharing resources to advance the beaver's keystone role in watershed health

When the lowering sun brings less daylight, and when the cooling ponds skim over with ice, beavers must prepare their lodges and caches for the coming deep freeze in total darkness. *Photo: Ben Goldfarb*

Stories and News

Low-Tech Process-Based Restoration Workshop Focuses on Montana's Prairies

On November 17-18, the National Wildlife Federation convened a virtual workshop in cooperation with the University of Montana and U.S. Bureau of Land Management to highlight restoration activities currently underway, challenges encountered, and opportunities to scale up restoration on Montana's prairie landscapes. The interactive program featured presentations from practitioners engaged in or planning restoration work and researchers studying impacts.

This gathering was made possible by the support of the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's Northern Great Plains Program, through which NWF and BLM have implemented low-tech, process-based restoration projects in four counties in north-central Montana over the past three years. The grant included support for a "lessons-learned" convening, with the purpose of sharing information among and connecting practitioners with diverse affiliations in both the public and private sectors. Approximately 50 people participated throughout the two-day program.

The resources shared at this gathering are available [here](#), and the video recordings with integrated audio transcripts are available [here](#):

Day 1: [here](#)

Day 2: [here](#)

For more information about this program, please contact Sarah Bates, NWF, bates@nwf.org

Beaver Conflict Resolution Technician Elissa Cho (right) works with college students from Swan Valley Connections' field program, Landscape and Livelihood, to complete culvert fences for Smith and Condon Creeks, near Condon. This two-fence effort is the Conflict Resolution Project's first collaboration with the US Forest Service and Swan Valley Connections, and its culvert protections will reduce road flooding and sediment pollution for an extensive, ecologically-rich beaver wetland complex. *Photo: Andrea DiNino / Swan Valley Connections*

Montana Beaver Conflict Resolution Project Completes a Successful Third Year

The Montana Beaver Conflict Resolution Project has successfully completed its third year. Since it began in 2019 as a pilot effort among partners with the Clark Fork Coalition, National Wildlife Federation, and Defenders of Wildlife, the program has steadily affirmed its three-fold goal: 1) to build greater tolerance for beavers on our landscape; 2) to reduce beaver-related problems via non-lethal methods; 3) to educate partners about these methods.

From its base in the Clark Fork River Watershed, the Conflict Resolution Program is achieving its goal with proven methods like pond levelers to minimize flooding, tree protection to deter intolerable browsing, and culvert fencing to reduce flow blockage (and flooding) near roads. Elissa Cho, who has served as the project's Beaver Conflict Resolution Technician for the last three years, has increasingly delivered respected, enduring results for private and public landowners.

In its first two years the project completed 13 on-the-ground projects and delivered four hands-on workshops. In 2021 the project has continued to expand, not only by diversifying the places of its success, but also the partners with whom it works. This year the project completed 17 installations including: four pond levelers, seven exclusion fences, and six tree wrapping projects. Workshops and hands-on training opportunities to help install flow devices engaged private landowners, federal and state agencies, MT Rail Link, conservation districts, college students, and regional nonprofits. Special thanks to FWP's Nongame Biologist (Reg. 2) Torrey Rier for helping the project to partner with game wardens and biologists.

Elissa completed the Beaver Institute's Beaver Corps training, and a certified specialist in nonlethal beaver management. She will present information about this collaborative program at the 2022 BeaverCon near Baltimore, MD. To learn more about the Montana Beaver Conflict Resolution Project, check out its press and updates at its Clark Fork Coalition or National Wildlife Federation webpages.

The two culvert fences installed near Condon featured an experimental opening in the upper left corner, which is a new design element for the projects in Montana. While the fence panel gaps are large enough for fish passage, the opening intends to accommodate the movement of mammals like otters and muskrats through the culvert. It is big enough that even beavers can fit through, but not while dragging sticks and debris to plug the culvert. If this experiment is successful, it may serve as a model for other locations, and if it does not serve the intended purpose, it can be amended by pinching the panels shut. *Photo: Rob Rich*

Upcoming Events

Nonlethal Strategies for Addressing Beaver Conflicts

Zoom Webinar

December 9, 2021 at 9:30-11:00am MST

Webinar link: [here](#)

Presenters:

Torrey Riñer – Nongame Wildlife Biologist for Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks in Region 2

Elissa Choñ – Beaver Conflict Resoluñon Specialist with the Clark Fork Coaliñon in Missoula (partner in the Montana Beaver Conflict Resoluñon Program with Nañonal Wildlife Federañon and Defenders of Wildlife)

Overview: Beavers are incredible engineers whose impacts shape enñre ecosystems. However, those engineering capabiliñes can also lead to major conflicts with human infrastructure. In this webinar, we will highlight how nonlethal beaver conflict resoluñon can be more efficient and cost-effecñve than repeatedly trapping beavers out of conflict hotspots, and how the pracñce is directly ñed to the effort to restore beavers to areas of their historic range for the ecosystem services they provide. We will then take a deep dive into innovañve, nonlethal techniques for dealing with beaver conflicts with the goal of empowering others to take on these projects in the future.

Agenda: We will reserve some ñme at the end of each presenter’s porñon for quesñons and discussion from the audience, with ñme for a longer discussion at the end of the webinar.

9:30 – 9:35 am Introducñons and overview

9:35 – 9:45 am Torrey – Beavers in Montana and why they are important

9:45 – 10:00 am Torrey – Beaver conflict resoluñon as a form of “beaver restorañon”

10:00 – 10:05 am Elissa – Overview of the CFC Beaver Conflict Resoluñon Program

10:05 – 10:20 am Elissa – The strategies, materials, costs, and labor

10:20 – 10:40 am Elissa – Tailoring the strategy to fit the conflict situañon

10:40 – 10:45 am Torrey and Elissa – The best conflict resoluñon resources

10:45 – 11:00 am Quesñons and discussion with parñcipants

Beaver Con 2022

Building Climate Resilience: A Nature-Based Approach

Hunt Valley, MD

March 8-10, 2022

Registrañon is now open for the second East Coast BeaverCON 2022 (building off the successful model hosted in Oregon in alternañng years). This in-person beaver conference is back to become even beñer. In addiñon to registrañon, the organizing commiñee is eager to accept new sponsors and consider abstracts and poster proposals from willing contributors. Find out more [here](#).

Resources

Channel-spanning dams like this one, on the Methow River, would have posed no problems for fish in all the millennia in which they evolved with beavers. But today, to help beavers and fish conñue to survive together, we

have to ask new questions, and find new solutions. *Photo: Methow Beaver Project*

Slowing Down Streams for Salmon

Brianna Randall, National Wildlife Federation
November 29, 2021

Can a beaver dam be too high? For the right fish at the wrong time, maybe, especially as climate change and other human-caused impacts have altered stream conditions. That is why the Methow Beaver Project is experimenting with some novel applications of the pond leveler. While typically used to reduce flooding concerns for people, this device used to moderate flow can also be used to lessen stress for salmon. In north-central Washington, where chinook salmon journey hundreds of miles to reach the waters where the Methow Beaver Project works, efforts to lower dams and create side channel alternative habitats are underway. To learn more about these creative approaches to complex problems, check out [this new blog post](#).

Volunteers BDA-builders in action along California Creek, a tributary to the Ruby River. *Photo: Studio MacLeod*

California Creek LTPBR Restoration: Virtual Project Tour

Ruby Valley Conservation District
November 3, 2021

Storing water and diversifying habitat are visibly obvious benefits of low-tech process-based restoration (LTPBR), but did you know that LTPBR can also help with more cryptic conservation challenges, like non-point source pollution? With diffuse causal origins, non-point source pollution often requires funding support from a special provision of the Clean Water Act - Section 319 - which is administered by the Department of Environmental Quality in Montana. In our state, excessive fine sediments from roads or forestry, agricultural, and mining practices (past and present) are often a leading non-point source pollutant impairing water quality. But to see what LTPBR has to say about non-point source pollution, check out [this excellent overview video](#) from London Bernier, a Big Sky Watershed Corps member with the Ruby Valley Conservation District. The virtual tour of a project on a key tributary to the Ruby River is sure to inspire action for the many related needs across Montana.

Birds, Beavers, and Beef

Hunter VanDonsel, Pheasants Forever
October 27, 2021

You might think this title requires weeding out a misfit word, but this story of action from a ranch in north-central Montana offers evidence to the contrary. In this region, the severe drought of 2021 helped diverse stakeholders see the profound ways that beaver wetlands offer resilience to moderate extremes. This is an account of how difficult conditions helped change minds and create solutions that work for people and wildlife. With financial assistance from the NRCS Conservation Stewardship Program and Ducks Unlimited, as well as partnership with The Nature Conservancy, Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever worked with volunteers and landowner Brian Fox

to install 11 beaver dam analogues. They realized some effort was required to reverse what was lost - "it took 15 volunteers to do the work of a 50 pound rodent" - but they also worked in a reach that has strong potential to lure live beavers from upstream, and they feel their partnership and impact has promise to grow in the dry times ahead. Read the whole account [here](#).

Creating Miracles in the Desert: Restoring Dixie Creek Film

Partners to Conserve Sagebrush Rangelands / Little Wild Productions

October 27, 2021

Decades in the making, the restoration of Dixie Creek offers more hope for dry times. This saga from northern Nevada has become a flagship case of what can happen when a stream is allowed to provide food and building materials for an expanding beaver population. Grazing practices and beaver exclusions meant healthy streambanks had long-been denied, but when partners reversed these behaviors, these habitat surged in green. Check out [this video](#) to see the long-term promise of partnering with beaver.

The trees in the background have died, but Dr. Emily Fairfax stands in a wetland that beavers kept green through northern Colorado's Cameron Peak Fire. With so many new wildfires impacting the West, Dr. Fairfax is able to gather more and more evidence for the vital role that beavers play as buffers against extreme loss. *Photo: Alex Kager / KUNC*

Beavers Build Ecosystems of Resilience

Science Friday Podcast

October 22, 2021

Would you ever think beavers would beam out of 436 national public radio stations across the country? Well, you should! Spurred by Alex Hager's September coverage of the resilience of beaver wetlands after Colorado's Cameron Peak Wildfire, the award-winning *Science Friday* podcast has expanded the story's reach. Part of "The State of Science" spotlight series, "featuring local science stories of national significance," this lively conversation with Hager and Dr. Emily Fairfax has reached over 1.8 million listeners. You can join them [here](#).

Blackfoot Nation Ksik Stakii (Beaver) Project Presentation

Montana Watershed Coordination Council - Conservation Conversations Series

Recorded program from October 13, 2021

If you missed MWCC's October conversation with Termaine Edmo and Gerald Wagner of the Blackfoot Environmental Office, the recording of their presentation and the lively Q&A that followed is now available on the [MWCC Training page](#). Gerald and Termaine spoke about Blackfoot Nation's climate resiliency initiatives with a focus on the Ksik Stakii (Beaver) Project, which received a 2021 Montana Watershed Stewardship Award.

Please send photos, stories, upcoming events, and other resources to:
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MT Beaver Working Group newsletters are posted online and can be found [here](#).

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