

Restoring Beavers for Montana’s Watershed Health

2021 Montana Beaver Action Plan



Riparian restoration on prairie streams in north-central Montana. Photo: Sarah Bates

On March 19, 2021, the Clark Fork Coalition and National Wildlife Federation convened a virtual workshop to advance Montana’s Beaver Action Plan (original plan from 2020 is available [here](#)). This meeting served as a benchmark to assess progress made since February 2020, when participants most recently gathered to outline key goals, strategies, and actions they would pursue. Over the course of two hours, the meeting highlighted contributions from the US Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, Montana Natural Heritage Program, and Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks in a series of “lightning round” presentations, and it affirmed the 2021 Action Plan Progress Report, which not only revealed needs for improvement, but also specific examples of success.

Polls conducted during the meeting and summarized in the following pages suggest priorities for work towards beaver restoration in 2021, and identify goal-based teams supporting those priorities. After combining the results of pre-meeting solicitation and sign ups at the meeting, the teams filled out with several participants representing varied entities, as well as leaders tasked with keeping lines of communication open and sharing out information about progress in each of these areas.

The following data from those polls details the percentage of all partners present at the meeting (n = 22) who endorsed individual actions as a priority, as well as a relative scale to rank the prioritizations as low (orange), medium (yellow), or high (green). The list of team members follows each poll. The Montana Beaver Working Group newsletter will provide a forum for sharing photos/stories, events, and resources that highlight success and opportunities developed in group discussions and elsewhere. We intend to convene the Montana Beaver Working Group early in 2022, to again assess progress and strategies for the good work to continue.

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Goal 1: Integrate beaver into the design and approach of stream and wetland restoration, so that beaver restoration scales up and expands beyond isolated beaver habitat projects.

Actions	Total Votes	% Votes	
a. Prioritize suitable areas for restoration	16	25%	H
b. Analyze historic beaver presence using BRAT model	6	9%	M
c. Coordinate development of methods (including citizen science) for surveying habitat and occupancy	6	9%	M
d. Develop a decision flow chart for restoration planning	6	9%	M
e. Prioritize restoration action on public lands	14	22%	H
f. Research and communicate about fisheries concerns and other problems	7	11%	M
g. Compile and share info about beaver/fisheries in professional meetings and publications	8	13%	M
h. New actions*	1	2%	L
TOTALS:	64	100%	

*Goal 1 new actions not received at this time

Goal 1 Team Members

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Goal 2: Expand beaver on public lands headwaters to restore self-sustaining ecological processes on riparian lands that will build resilience to drought and wildfires.

a. Develop a briefing memo for federal/ tribal/ state agencies on shared goals and objectives for beaver management & restoration	10	36%	M
b. Draft & circulate a MOU among FWP, USFS, BLM, Blackfeet Nation, to expand beaver on public lands	15	54%	H
c. New actions*	3	10%	M
TOTALS:	29	100%	

*Goal 2 new actions proposed: Work with FWP to identify, develop, and fully document a pilot project for beaver relocation.

Goal 2 Team Members

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Goal 3a: Provide coordinated education and outreach on the benefits of beavers and options for addressing nuisance concerns.			
a. Develop a single set of education resources for the general public	13	27%	H
b. Develop BRAT-focused education materials	5	10%	M
c. Identify point people and organizations to store, distribute, and update education materials and commit to outreach	12	24%	M
d. Develop a packet of materials on beaver conflict resolution plus workshops & training	17	35%	H
e. New actions*	2	4%	L
TOTALS:	49	100%	

* Goal 3 new actions proposed: Establish estimates of natural water storage potential and goals at the watershed and sub-watershed scales.

Goal 3b: Priority Audiences for Education & Outreach			
cities and counties	7	8%	M
land trusts, watershed groups, conservation districts	19	22%	H
ranchers and farmers, stockgrowers, Farm Bureau etc.	19	22%	H
trappers, hunters, anglers	8	9%	M
federal & state agencies: USFS, BLM, FWP, DNRC	17	20%	H

Montana Dept. of Transportation, railroads	7	8%	M
schools, teachers	3	4%	M
amenity landowners	5	6%	M

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Goal 4: Remove legal and policy obstacles to beaver habitat restoration and relocation of beavers to suitable, prioritized habitat.			
a. Share experiences among practitioners in procuring permits for BDAs	13	21%	H
b. Encourage use of existing regulatory tools to permit BDAs	13	21%	H
c. Build communication with US Army Corps of Engineers by doing tours	13	21%	H
d. Engage DNRC and FEMA in dialogue about floodplain admin to process BDAs	8	13%	M
e. Share info from other state's approaches to relocation	4	6%	M
f. FWP update guidance on beaver relocation procedure	11	17%	M
g. New opps	1	1%	L
TOTALS:	63	100%	

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*Goal 4 new actions proposed: 1) Improve 404 acceptance of BDAs and beaver-related work requires efforts at the national level to influence the NWP process; 2) Get BLM on the list of federal entities that can enter into "binding agreements" that the Corps can vouch for.