

# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND EDUCATION

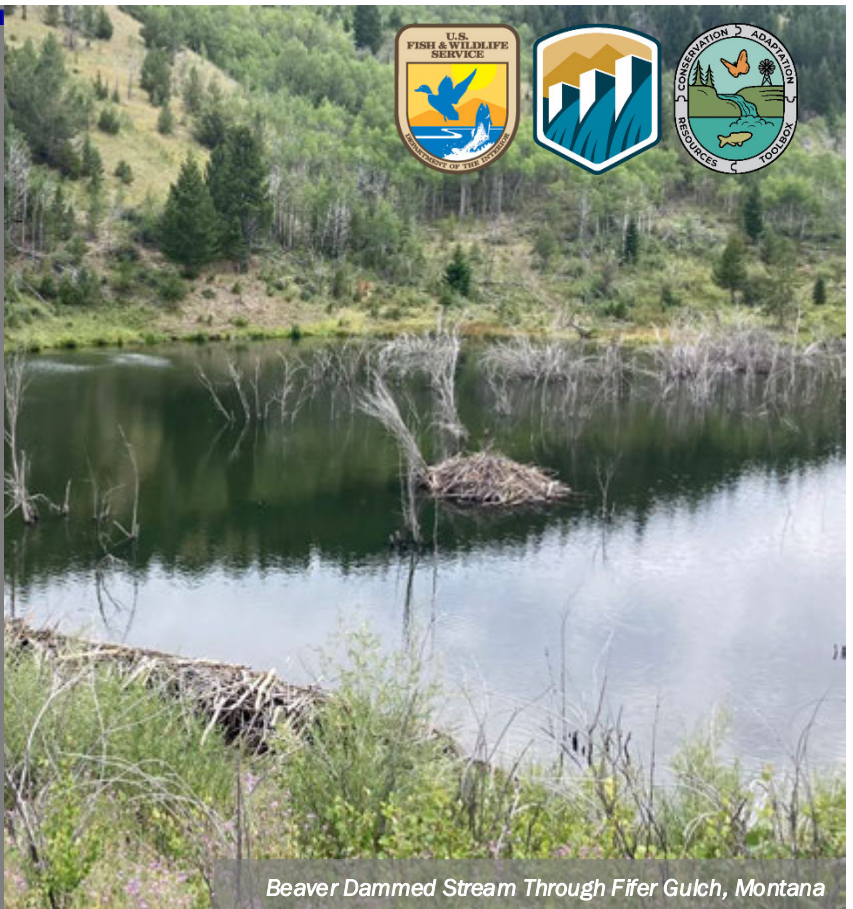
## Beaver Conflict Resolution in the Clark Fork Basin



**NATIONAL  
WILDLIFE  
FEDERATION**



North American beavers (*Castor canadensis*) create wetlands that are important for ecosystem restoration by damming waterways for habitat. Beaver built wetlands help landowners manage climate change related flooding and droughts. Because their dams may conflict with land management goals by affecting infrastructure or flooding property, beavers are often removed by trapping. Beaver conflict management programs help landowners live with beavers while minimizing the property damage caused by their dam building. In 2019, the Clark Fork Coalition partnered with Defenders of Wildlife and the National Wildlife Federation to pilot a Beaver Conflict Resolution (BCR) Program in western Montana.



Beaver Dammed Stream Through Fifer Gulch, Montana

### KEY ISSUES ADDRESSED

In the Clark Fork watershed, beaver activity can lead to plugged culverts, flooded roads and fields, and felled trees that can damage infrastructure. The traditional method of trapping and killing is not a long-term solution because beavers often return to the same sites over and over. Repeated removal drains resources and time from MT Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) staff, road departments, private landowners, and state and federal land management agencies. As climate change results in unpredictable precipitation patterns in Montana, landowners increasingly value beaver wetlands as a source of water in drought conditions. They are more willing to tolerate beavers on the landscape, especially in headwater areas. However, they lack the resources, cost-effective tools, and expertise needed to co-exist with some beaver activity.

### PROJECT GOALS

- Build more tolerance and understanding for beavers on the landscape
- Reduce beaver conflicts using nonlethal methods
- Train partner organizations to implement nonlethal methods

## BENEFITTING FROM BEAVERS

Many Montana landowners want the benefits of beaver wetlands. The Beaver Conflict Resolution Program provides resources to address landowner concerns such as flooding or tree felling.



Beaver Specialist with Dammed Culvert Fence

## LESSONS LEARNED

Landowners' experiences and word-of-mouth are helping to expand the program. Prior to the BCR Program, some coexistence devices were not installed or maintained correctly, and nonlethal beaver management alternatives were not trusted. Now that the program has been in place for six years, maintenance recommendations have been established and more landowners are on board with trialing the approach.

Training partners takes time. The BCR Program is working with nonprofits and federal and state agencies to train staff members in conflict resolution techniques. Though the trainings have been effective, every situation is unique, and it is difficult to standardize all the considerations needed in each conflict. The Beaver Specialist visits the sites and provides tailored recommendations. They also monitor the installations to collect data on how the devices are functioning.

The process to design and implement these coexistence devices can take up to a month because of the process required by conservation districts to issue 310 permits, while processing a damage permit takes a few days. Depending on the situation, a month can be too long for a landowner to wait, or the beaver may have already moved out of the area.

## NEXT STEPS

- Expand BCR Program into additional FWP regions by collaborating with smaller watershed groups
- Train two additional Beaver Specialists in FWP Regions 3 and 4

## PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

**A Path to Coexistence:** When landowners are interested in pursuing coexistence strategies, the Beaver Specialist completes an initial site assessment, provides a cost estimate, and starts the permitting process through FWP or the conservation district. Defenders of Wildlife provides some cost-share for the installation.

**Simple, Low-Cost Devices:** Culvert fencing is used to keep beavers out of culverts; pond levelers and pipe devices are installed to deal with areas where flooding is a problem. Tree fencing protects mature trees as well as groups of saplings.

**Resource and Time Efficient:** When beaver conflicts are addressed through nonlethal methods, FWP staff can spend less time issuing permits and responding to complaints. For example, when a culvert fencing device is installed to stop beaver dam creation in the culvert, road crews who previously had to unblock culverts and address flooded roads can address other DOT priorities.

**By the Numbers:** The Beaver Conflict Resolution Program worked with landowners to complete eight projects the first year, six projects in 2020, 17 projects in 2021, 15 projects in 2022, and 15 projects in 2023.

## Collaborators

- Clark Fork Coalition
- Defenders of Wildlife
- Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks
- See online for full list of partners

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Tree Wrapping to Protect from Beaver Chew in Bitterroot Valley