NUISANCE BEAVER

Beaver can sometimes be a nuisance and, in many areas in the Upper Peninsula, they are just that to many of the citizens.

Beaver damage control has become a big problem since the last open season for the trapping of beaver in the spring of 1946. Three Predatory Animal Control Officers have expended most of their time during the past two years in an attempt to control such damage. An increasing amount of the Conservation Officers' time is also expended on beaver damage control work.

Conservation Officers and Game men report a decided increase in the beaver population during the past two years. With the population increase is a definite increase in damage and the need for more and more control. Damage is varied and occurs to many different types of property.

Beaver find culverts and bridges ideal places to build their dams. Roads and railroads are soon flooded or a washout occurs from the high water stored behind the dam.

A dam is constructed on the stream through or near a farm and fields and gardens are flooded, ruining crops or making the preparing of the ground impossible.

The outlet of a lake is dammed by beaver and the cottagers find their boat houses and docks flooded, exposed shoreline sand under water, and shoreline timber killed by flood waters.

Beaver on the lake also are cutting white birch, aspen, and other trees on lakeshore owners' property. The timber owner finds a series of beaver dams have flooded his adjacent low timber lands, killing

commercial or potential commercial evergreen trees that usually grow on such lands.

The State is not immune from such damage. Beaver dam up streams and springs that furnish water to our hatcheries; trees are being cut by the beaver in the scenic spots of the State Parks; and truck trails have been flooded and washed out. Timber has been damaged by beaver ponds on State Forests. It is needless to say that property owners consider damage financially costly, as are the measures to remedy the damage.

Control measures are usually standard. Beaver are taken in live-traps from areas where they are doing damage and are transferred to lakes or streams where they are unlikely to do damage. In many instances they can be placed where they can be of help by creating duck breeding grounds, needed water reservoirs, or checking fast-running water. Dams are removed by blasting or with specialized equipment if blasting is likely to damage fish life.

Individual officers working on beaver damage have live-trapped and moved as many as 100 beaver in a single month during the past summer. From two to twelve beaver have been moved from a single colony. These control measures are not likely to be permanent because once beaver have become established in an area, and food is sufficient, continued damage can be expected from other colonies moving in. The young remain with their parents for two years and are then forced to leave the colony. Many of these beaver are moving about looking for new locations each summer and soon begin the task of building their dams and homes and of cutting forest products to store in their feed beds, which are their winter food supply.

Beaver damage is one of the factors to consider in establishing an open season for the taking of beaver. When damage is acute in an area, a reduction in beaver population resulting from a trapping season is usually a good lasting remedy.

Other factors also are to be considered in establishing an open season for trapping. The relationship of beaver to trout, which is being studied at the present time, is always a major consideration.

Various sportsmen and conservation administrators are often outspoken either in favor of beaver dams on trout streams or in opposition to them on such waters. Arguments advanced in support of the beavers hold that their activities favor: (1) production of a good supply of fish food behind the dam for two to four or more years; (2) development of better shelter for trout; (3) maintenance of water flow in temporary streams and checking of torrential run-offs; and (4) augmentation of trout habitat by an increased water supply in spring runs.

Opponents of beaver dams maintain that: (1) in four or five years the ponds become "sour", a source of minor pollution, and at the same time increase the number of parasites in trout; (2) the dams constitute a barrier to spawning migrations, and silt accumulating behind beaver dams covers spawning beds and chokes springs; (3) trout in impoundments are concentrated for the angler and the predator, who are likely to overfish the area and deplete the trout stock; and (4) oxygen content of dammed streams is so reduced and water temperature raised so high that fish population is dominated by chubs rather than the favored trout.

The generalizations mentioned above obviously are not entirely applicable to every beaver pond, the effects of a dam being different according to the type of stream on which it is located. In most instances Michigan's beaver dams seem detrimental on slow streams, whereas on faster waters they may be a decided aid in trout production. Beaver establish themselves on the slow streams, or slow portions of streams, in most areas. That is where most of the damage occurs from the work of nuisance beaver.

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