

# Proper management ensures beavers aren't a bother

**F**or many Wyoming residents, the state's abundant and diverse wildlife is a source of pride—and occasionally a nuisance. The beaver, in particular, comes with unique challenges. While these industrious rodents play a vital role in nature, their activities can cause tree damage, flooding, and other issues for landowners.

Still, before resolving to get those bothersome beavers off your property, it's worth considering some alternatives.

## Beneficial beavers

The buck-toothed creatures gnawing on your trees play a critical role in maintaining healthy riparian ecosystems. Their dam-building activities slow down water flow, raise the water table, and recharge aquifers, keeping more water in Wyoming and on your property.

Beaver dams and ponds help filter pollutants and trap sediment, which improves water quality. They irrigate riparian plants and provide important habitat for trout, moose, and other wildlife. Beavers' modifications to streams and rivers can also reduce erosion and act as a natural fire break.

## Management options

When possible, it is best to leave beavers alone and instead take measures to protect your property, in some cases before beavers establish themselves. Removing them from your property can be costly and time-consuming—and doesn't always work in the long run. If they establish in a location once, that indicates that you have good beaver habitat, and more beavers will likely establish themselves there in the future.

However, in settings like irrigation ditches and canals, removal may be necessary. In that case, there are lethal and nonlethal options. For more information, contact your local Wyoming Game and Fish Department office.

## Bothersome behaviors

Beavers chew on trees for food, to trim their teeth, and for use in dams and lodges. Tree cutting is one of the top concerns of landowners who live with beavers.

To protect your trees, you can fence them or paint them with a paint/sand mixture. It is best to focus your efforts on mature aspen, cottonwood, poplar, and willow trees within 200 feet of a stream, ditch, or pond.



Photo by the Wyoming Game and Fish Department

## Fencing trees

There are two different ways to fence your trees. You can wrap each tree individually or fence an entire stand of trees. No matter which way you choose to fence, you should use 8- to 14-gauge welded wire fencing (length depends on the number of trees). Do not use chicken wire! It rusts quickly, and beavers can chew through it.

To construct a sturdy fence, you'll also need hog rings and hog ring pliers. Small zip ties also work, but are less durable. Some land managers may choose to use T-posts or rebar and baling wire for additional reinforcement.

Beavers are good diggers, so make sure to install the fence in contact with the ground. The finished fence should measure at least 2 feet above your highest winter snow depth.

## Wrapping trees

Some land managers and property owners choose to wrap each tree with wire mesh rather than constructing a freestanding fence.

To determine the amount of wire mesh required, measure the tree's circumference and add 6 feet. Wrap the wire around the tree, leaving 6 to 10 inches of space between the fence and the tree. This allows room for the tree to grow. Secure the wire with 10 to 12 hog rings.

For added stability, or to prevent beavers from digging underneath, reinforce the fencing by securing it with 1 to 2 T-posts or 2 to 4 rebar stakes wired to the



Fencing individual trees is one way to protect them from beavers. Photo by the Wyoming Game and Fish Department.

fence with baling wire. The finished wire should measure 4 feet up the tree or at least 2 feet above your highest winter snow depth.

## Protecting a group of trees

A grove of trees can be protected by encircling all the trees with a single fence. Some land managers have successfully experimented with leaving the side of the grove farthest from the water unfenced, but results may vary.

In other cases, landowners concerned about aesthetics or uneven terrain have successfully protected their trees using electrified fencing placed 4 inches above the ground. Electric fence kits are often solar-powered and allow for more discreet fencing of your trees.

## Using sand-paint for protection

Sand-paint offers an alternative to fencing mature trees. While fencing or wrapping is generally more efficient and longer lasting, sand-paint is less labor intensive and may be less noticeable. Note that sand-paint lasts for several years on mature trees but does



Look carefully to see where light gray sand-paint was applied to deter Lander's busy beavers from munching on these cottonwood trees. Photo by the Wyoming Game and Fish Department.

not work for saplings.

To get started, purchase exterior latex paint (in a color that matches the tree's bark) and 30-70 mil Mason sand. Then, use one of the following formulas to make sand-paint.

- Mix 5 ounces of sand per quart of paint.
- Mix 20 ounces of sand per gallon of paint.
- Mix 140 grams of sand per liter of paint.

Mix the formula on the day you paint and prepare



Photo by the Wyoming Game and Fish Department.

only the amount you think you will use that day. More sand is not better, as a mixture with too much sand will not adhere to the tree. Apply paint to the bottom 3 to 4 feet of the tree and at least 2 feet above the highest snow levels in your area.

### Other common issues

Beaver activity can plug culverts and cause ponds to overflow or become larger than desired. Rather than get rid of your beavers, try using the following management strategies.

To prevent culvert blockage or damming, build a protective enclosure or fence around the upstream intake of the culvert. Beavers generally won't dam around the perimeter of the fence.

If you run into flooding issues or a pond becomes too large, flow control devices offer a proven

solution. Beavers build dams where they hear running water, and these devices create leaks that beavers are unable to detect or prevent because water flows through them silently.

A caged intake is installed upstream of the dam and a flow control device is placed through the dam. The outlet pipe is partially submerged and installed at the desired height. The positioning of the outlet pipe controls the depth of the pond behind the dam.

### Need help?

To learn more about mitigation methods, contact a local Wyoming Game and Fish office or peruse the resources recommended in this article. For technical and financial assistance, contact the Natural Resource Conservation Service or local conservation districts. Cost-

share programs are also offered through Defenders of Wildlife (visit [defenders.org/bothered-beavers](https://defenders.org/bothered-beavers) to learn more).

By putting in a little work up front, landowners can foster a harmonious relationship with beavers, ensuring the continued vitality of their properties and surrounding ecosystems for generations to come.

As an information and education specialist for the Wyoming Game and Fish Department, **Rene Schell** helps ensure the humans and beavers of Lander, Wyoming, coexist peacefully. She can be contacted at [rene.schell@wyo.gov](mailto:rene.schell@wyo.gov) or (307) 335-2630.

### Additional resources

- *Beaver Benefits* (Wyoming Game and Fish Department): <https://bit.ly/wgfd-beaver-benefits>
- *Beaver Best Management Practices - A Practical Guide to Living and Working with Beaver* (Grand Canyon Trust): <https://bit.ly/beaver-guide>

