

Weekend Environment



Helping beavers and humans coexist

Project shows alternative to dealing with the animals

Beavers have long been seen as a nuisance animal, but conservation groups and municipalities are now working together to create an alternative to lethal options for managing them.

Constantly removing a beaver dam blocking a culvert under 160 Street northwest of Red Deer Lake has cost the MD thousands of dollars a year, while a growing pond was becoming a concern for area landowners.

A test project at the location has some hoping the water will start flowing once again without having to remove the family of beavers at the site.

"It enables them to stay in place, but prevents them from causing flooding damage," said Rachelle Haddock, project manager at the Miistakis Institute.

A two-day workshop was hosted last month to show how to install devices intended to help beavers and humans coexist.

Crews installed an exclusion device inside Calgary before moving to the 160 street west location where a beaver exclusion device and a pond leveler were installed.

The beaver exclusion device is a wire cage installed on a culvert to prevent beavers from blocking it. The pond leveler is a long pipe that

drains water from the pond through a beaver dam. In the 160 Street location, the pipe extends into the culvert behind the exclusion device.

"You can set the height of the pond, typically it's in front of the dam," said Haddock. "You can determine what height the pond will be at so that the pond doesn't flood the road."

The project was jointly hosted by the Miistakis Institute, Fur-Bearers, Cows and Fish – Alberta Riparian Habitat Management Society, the City of Calgary and the MD of Foothills.

Haddock said they all recognize the problems beavers pose to landowners and municipalities.

"They can cut down prized trees, they can flood infrastructure and often there's a great cost involved in having to address the problems," she said.

Haddock said there is value to having beavers on the land supporting the ecosystem. She said wetlands created by beaver dams help to clean water, recharge groundwater systems, slow runoff and reduce the potential impact of floods.

"We see great value in having beavers on the landscape," said Haddock. "We also recognize that beavers can be a problem for people."

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Photos by **Brent Calver**

A section of pipe is cut for a test project installing beaver exclusion devices near 160 Street northwest of Red Deer Lake. The pipe is run through the beaver dam and drains through a culvert under a road to prevent water from backing up.



Volunteers work to install a barrier to prevent beavers from damming the water flow around a culvert near Priddis on Sept. 23.

TOP RIGHT: MD of Foothills councillor Suzanne Oel championed the prevention method in the MD and was on-hand for the Sept. 23 operation.

Kerri O'Shaughnessy with Cows and Fish, a habitat management society, and Adrian Nelson, a wildlife conflict manager for Fur-Bearers clear rocks and debris before placing a cage that will prevent beavers from damming a large culvert near Priddis.

Beaver exclusion devices have been installed in locations in the Ann and Sandy Cross Conservation Area, including one near a beaver lodge built by 85 Street (pictured), after the animals were reintroduced to two locations in the site in 2012. The animals have thrived in the area and have expanded to 10 sites in the conservation area.





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MD coun. Suzanne Oel said devices and techniques shown at the workshops are a tool landowners and the municipalities can use to manage beavers and limit the potential impact they may have.

She said there is a growing beaver population on the MD's west end.

Oel said there are strong opinions on both sides and people are learning about new approaches to managing beaver numbers.

The animals are seen by many as a nuisance and the main approach to deal with them has been lethal removal.

Oel hopes the workshop will show there is another way to deal with them.

"This coexistence alternative is that some of the beavers would stay in place and you would mitigate the effects in the infrastructure and the level of the water," she said.

It could also help save money.

Oel said it cost the MD \$2,000 each time it had to go to the 160 Street site to clean out a blocked culvert.

"At least two times a year we had to go in there with an excavator and use a large telephone pole and push that debris through the culvert," she said.

Officials at the Cross Conservation Area have high hopes for the future of Canada's national symbol and for using the exclusion devices to help them coexist with humans.

Beavers were reintroduced into the Cross Conservation area in 2012 at two locations in the upper reaches of the Pine Creek. Three were introduced in Rothney Pond on the north arm of the Pine Creek and four were introduced in Goodwin Pond on the south arm.

Greg Shyba, Cross Conservation Area CEO, said they successfully established themselves

and their numbers are growing and it's believed other beavers have come onto the property.

"We do have a thriving population and a growing wetland because of them," he said.

The Cross Conservation area has installed exclusion devices and pond levelers at two locations where beavers have become established.

Shyba said the devices are working.

"We can maintain a constant water level in those areas," he said.

Shyba said they haven't done a count of the number of beavers in the Cross Conservation area, but 10 beaver lodges have been established on the property.

"We do see the evidence of them and we do see them from time to time, but it's difficult to do a count of them because you have to stay there for a long time and they do a lot of their work at night," he said.

Shyba said some have been lost to predators, but he believes their numbers are healthy.

The beavers were brought in to study their impact on the watershed areas and he said they want to show beavers can coexist with humans.

He said it's been a success as the beavers have done an excellent job reestablishing wetlands in the conservation area.

"[There are] large expanded wetlands, we're holding a lot of water back," he said. "You can see birds, mammals, deer, moose that are enjoying the wetlands. It's also, I think, interesting to note the word is out and people are coming out to observe them."

Shyba hopes to continue to build on the work done in the last four years.

The conservation area has received \$27,500 from the provincial government to further develop a wetland project on the north arm of Pine Creek using beavers.

"We're just in the process of getting that project underway," Shyba said.

Volunteers work to install a barrier to prevent beavers from damming the water flow around a culvert near Priddis on Sept. 23.