



**OREGON CHAPTER  
OF THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY**  
PO Box 2378  
Corvallis, OR 97339

DATE: MAY 25, 2020

FROM: **Oregon Chapter of the Wildlife Society**

SUBJECT: **Requests to Ban Beaver Trapping**

TO: **Oregon Fish & Wildlife Commission**

Dear Commissioners:

The Wildlife Society is an international organization founded in 1937, representing nearly 10,000 professionals, including scientists, managers, educators, technicians, planners, consultants, conservation officers, students and others who manage, conserve, and study wildlife populations and habitat. In Oregon, the Oregon Chapter of The Wildlife Society (ORTWS) represents nearly 800 such professionals from many areas of public and private enterprise. Our mission is to promote wise conservation and management of wildlife resources in Oregon by serving and representing natural resource professionals. A central purpose of ORTWS is to support scientifically sound management policies.

ORTWS is writing in response to multiple requests submitted to the Commission to amend OAR 635-050-0070 as it pertains to where American beaver (*Castor canadensis*) may be trapped within the state, specifically:

- Requests to ban beaver trapping within Siuslaw National Forest in response to restoration efforts
- Requests to ban beaver trapping across all federal lands in Oregon

### **The best available science does not support permanent trapping bans**

ORTWS does not recommend the adoption of either request based on our review of the best available science on current beaver populations and management strategies within the state of Oregon. A permanent ban on beaver trapping across the Siuslaw National Forest and/or across all federal lands in the state lacks data to support claims that recreational and commercial beaver trapping are limiting factors to beaver populations (Figures 1 & 2, Appendix). Annual harvest of beavers has decreased since 1950 as a result of reduced hunting and trapping efforts, and current beaver populations in Oregon are considered to be very healthy (Hiller, 2011). Through our review of available research, we determined there is a need for more data collection and additional studies on habitat availability and habitat use by beaver throughout the state to better inform management decisions. When resources such as water and food are limited, beaver move to areas where those resources exist.

Numerous scientific articles showcase the benefits beaver play as ecosystem engineers and as a keystone species across the west (Naiman et al. 1986, Pollock et al. 1995, Gibson and Olden 2014, Bouwes et al. 2016). Their value to the ecological health of riparian systems and their ability to improve habitat for other species cannot be understated. However, management decisions that limit sustainable use of wildlife resources must be evaluated based on biological science, and demonstrate effective strategies to accomplish ecological restoration goals.

A recent beaver relocation study conducted in the Alsea Basin, which included release sites on Siuslaw National Forest, did not identify recreational or commercial trapping as a cause specific source of mortality (Petro et al. 2015). Another research study conducted in western Oregon found no evidence that beaver dispersal is limited by terrain features and that beaver appear to move freely within watersheds (manuscript in review, J. Taylor personal communication). Ongoing research in western Oregon is developing models to look at the effects of beaver dams on water temperature, developing models to predict beaver occurrence, and integrating beaver habitat use with climate change scenarios. More studies like these need to be completed in order to better understand best practices for managing watersheds that include beaver.

### Sustainable wildlife resource management and responsibility

Permanent trapping bans would be in opposition to the well established practices of sustainable resource harvest and proven wildlife management strategies widely utilized in the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation (Organ et al. 2012). The long term success of the North American Model comes from seven interdependent principles that must be maintained for consistent, sustainable conservation. A core principle of the North American Model is the application of wildlife science to discharge management of wildlife resources. Given the lack of data on negative impacts of trapping, combined with harvest data showing recreational trapping harvest rates per unit effort have been consistent, there is little indication that trapping is having a negative population impact (ODFW, private communication, May 13, 2020). Trapping has long been recognized as an appropriate management tool for wildlife and habitats ([AFWA](#) 2015) , and significant efforts have been put forward to implement and maintain appropriate management techniques and strategies. Statewide or even regional bans on recognized management tools must be supported biologically, be limited in scope both spatially and temporally, and allow for the resumption of sustainable use when appropriate.

The Wildlife Society has adopted internationally accepted principles of natural resources conservation. These principles stipulate that management must maintain essential ecological processes, preserve genetic diversity, and ensure sustainable population numbers for the continued persistence of the species and the ecosystems they affect. Regulated trapping in Oregon is consistent with all of the aforementioned criteria and is recognized as an ecologically sound method of harvesting and managing furbearers that also provides for recreational and economic benefits ([TWS](#) 2020). Additionally, we support the Best Management Practices (BMP) for trapping that have been developed by the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies ([AFWA](#) 2020) and encourage ODFW to continue to promote these BMPs in furbearer management and outreach programs. Finally, regulated trapping is an important component of the lifestyles and

tradition of many people, and was the primary economic and political driver behind the U.S. establishing the Oregon Territory back in the early 1800s. Maintaining interest and support in sustainable activities that rely on the conservation and long-term survival of the species and associated habitats is good policy, using a robust foundation of wildlife science. Support for beaver populations must include all stakeholders, including those likely to be impacted by beaver behavior. Maintaining sustainable trapping activity is an established management method that allows the address of beaver conflict, while continuing to maintain funding for beaver conservation, and support for beaver populations as a whole.

### Data and research is necessary to better inform management decisions

Current data on beaver harvest indicate a sustainable population, however there are gaps in what land managers want from beaver and what beaver can provide. A review of beaver-related restoration practices in the western US indicated the need for investment in research, as implementation of restoration practices is occurring without evidence of efficacy or established best management practices (Pilliod et al. 2017). ORTWS strongly recommends that the Commission support further research related to managing watersheds that include beaver. All stream or river restoration projects should have baseline information on seasonal and annual use by beaver prior to initiating a project, and follow those observations through and after project completion. Monitoring of restoration efforts that include beaver are critical to address habitat restoration goals, and associated benefits to salmonids and other species. As wildlife managers, and public servants it is critical to address the efficacy of these efforts, to fulfill the public trust responsibility.

We reviewed numerous existing beaver trap bans in Oregon that date back decades, including Mt. Hood, Willowa-Whitman, Ochoco, Malheur, and Umatilla National Forests. Despite an average length of ~46 years for trapping limitations, we found no peer-reviewed research or written evidence in general that changes in beaver populations, or their effects on the landscape, were monitored much less reported. To allow another beaver trap ban in Oregon without baseline information on beaver and a plan for monitoring those effects is ill-advised and against the practices of responsible wildlife management.

### Recognizing the complex public acceptance and understanding of trapping

ORTWS recognizes that significant opposition to trapping exists among the public and we strongly advocate for further research to be conducted on furbearers, trappers, trapping methods, and attitudes of the public toward trapping to advance understanding and facilitate resolution of this controversial issue. Healthy beaver populations improve habitat for a variety of species and have large ecosystem benefits. However, beavers also have a history of conflict with human populations, with the potential for damage and associated loss of support from local communities. As seen in published research from Massachusetts, beaver trapping bans can have unintended consequences, such as increasing human-wildlife conflict, that change public attitudes (Jonker et al. 2006, 2009; Seimer et al. 2013). Developing management strategies must balance both the biological necessity of conserving this important species on the

landscape, maintaining public support, and engaging a variety of stakeholders in effective, science based management to fulfill the public trust.

On behalf of ORTWS Members and Board, thank you for your time and consideration in this matter and please do not hesitate to contact us with questions or to engage further discussion.

Respectfully,  
ORTWS Board of Directors

*“Conservation is paved with good intentions, which prove to be futile or even dangerous because they are devoid of critical understanding...”*

Aldo Leopold - Sand County Almanac

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## Appendix 1:

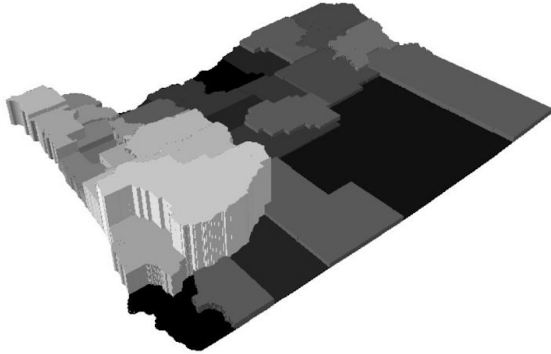
**Figure 1:** Beaver trapping and hunting take in Oregon from 1997-2016. Notice the total take has declined significantly since 1997 in response to reduced trapping and hunting efforts. Harvest success per unit of effort has remained steady, this is one indication that populations are stable and trapping/hunting pressure is not negatively affecting population (ODFW, 2018).

Appendix 10. Oregon beaver and muskrat catch per unit effort (Harvest/100 trap nights or days hunted) and average harvest per furtaker, 1997–2016. Data compiled from furtaker annual report where harvest and effort is reported. Take values exclude reports without reported effort, but occur in Appendix 14.

Species	Year	Trapping			Hunting			Combined		
		Total Take	# Trap Nights	Take/100 Nights	Total Take	# Hunt Days	Take/100 Days	Total Take	Total Furtakers	Take/Furtaker
Beaver	1997	5,442	102,346	5.3	97	302	32.1	5,539	341	16.2
	1998	2,995	62,831	4.8	42	110	38.2	2,976	249	12.0
	1999	2,840	56,618	5.0	32	160	20.0	2,798	240	11.7
	2000	3,487	75,740	4.6	39	185	21.1	3,385	250	13.5
	2001	3,858	62,919	6.1	52	238	21.9	3,900	256	15.2
	2002	3,208	65,807	4.9	67	167	40.1	3,178	256	12.4
	2003	2,639	49,230	5.4	105	160	65.6	2,581	236	10.9
	2004	2,644	58,024	4.6	127	132	96.2	2,771	257	10.8
	2005	2,866	53,794	5.3	14	34	41.2	2,880	211	13.6
	2006	3,209	51,774	6.2	42	106	39.6	3,251	276	11.8
	2007	2,463	44,321	5.6	34	227	15.0	2,497	239	10.4
	2008	2,412	62,986	3.8	89	227	39.2	2,501	284	8.8
	2009	2,793	66,274	4.2	21	269	7.8	2,814	281	10.0
	2010	3,198	66,267	4.8	48	163	29.5	3,246	268	12.1
	2011	2,681	56,817	4.7	50	204	24.5	2,731	251	10.9
	2012	2,831	57,742	4.9	56	158	35.4	2,869	278	10.3
	2013	3,244	73,283	4.4	49	187	26.2	3,293	310	10.6
	2014	1,925	50,936	3.8	20	73	27.4	1,945	214	9.1
	2015	1,305	39,426	3.3	19	66	28.8	1,326	171	7.7
2016	1,200	26,202	4.6	31	78	39.7	1,231	161	7.7	

**Figure 2:** Figures below are from the Oregon furbearer program report, 2010-2011 (Tiller, 2011).

**Relative number of beavers taken by trappers in Oregon during the 2010-2011 season.**



**Annual harvest of beavers by trappers in Oregon during 1951-2010.**

