

## History

The beaver (*Castor canadensis*) is an important mammal to Maryland, as well as to North America, from both a historical economic perspective and from an aesthetic perspective. Although excessive harvesting and unrestrained habitat destruction extirpated the beaver in Maryland by the early 1800s, reintroduction efforts have enabled the beaver to return to much of their former range. Their populations have grown steadily and occur in every county in the state and in every watershed in Howard County.

## Beaver in Howard County

Beaver can be among the most beneficial of the county's wildlife. They create favorable habitat for a variety of wildlife species including fish, birds, amphibians, reptiles, and mammals. This variety of wildlife is in turn valued for recreational, scientific, educational and aesthetic purposes. Beaver activity is also helpful in retaining storm water runoff and improves water quality by trapping sediment, nutrients, and pollutants. Beaver activity can also cause flooding of roads, trails, forest land. They also consume trees and shrubs. Their impacts often occur suddenly and dramatically.

These benefits and detriments often occur simultaneously at a single location. Because of the varying degrees of tolerance levels among people to beaver activity, there are bound to be disagreements on how best to "deal" with beaver conflicts.

## The Department's Role

In its role as a steward of Howard County's natural resources (Howard County Code Title 19, subtitle 2, Section 19.200-211), it shall be a goal of the Department of Recreation & Parks to practice an attitude of acceptance of, and tolerance for, beaver activity as part of the county's natural environment and it will foster this attitude among the public through education.

The Department recognizes beaver as a natural and desirable component of the environment because of their contribution to the quality and diversity of natural habitat.

However, it is also recognized that conflicts between beaver and humans arise when beaver activity impacts public health and safety, private property, or public infrastructure.



## Howard County Department of Recreation & Parks *presents the* **Environmental Education Series**

The goal of the Department of Recreation and Parks is to preserve a balance of ecological, natural and environmental values in Open Space land throughout the County. We strive to manage these areas in a way that will preserve their ecological integrity while making them available to the public for passive recreational use.

A key element in our management plan is public awareness and education. This brochure is one in a series of publications designed to educate the public on matters related to the conservation and preservation of our environment.

To help accomplish this goal, our staff is available to speak with various civic and community organizations and to assist with the planning and implementation of projects such as habitat enhancement, reforestation, stream walks, water quality monitoring, etc. It is our firm belief that only by working together can we fulfill the moral and civic responsibility with which we have all been charged . . . stewardship of the land.

For additional information, or to become involved in our programs, please call 410-313-4700 or visit our website, [www.ho.co.md.us/recparks.html](http://www.ho.co.md.us/recparks.html).

# Living With Beaver



**Howard County**  
M A R Y L A N D

**Department of Recreation & Parks**  
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Columbia, Maryland 21046  
410-313-4700  
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## Biology

The beaver is the largest rodent in North America. An adult can weigh between 30-60 lbs. and measure 25-31" in length.

Beavers are nocturnal which means they are most active at night.

Beavers are social animals and live in family units called colonies that can range in size from two to eight individuals.

Beavers are monogamous and mate in January and February. Four months later 2-5 one pound "kits" are born.

Beavers are herbivores. Their diet in the winter is comprised mainly of the bark of hardwood trees and shrubs such as willow, birch, maple, yellow-poplar, cherry, and alder. In warmer months they also consume aquatic plants, rhizomes of water lilies, sedges, grasses, ferns, and the leaves and twigs of trees.

The beaver greatly impacts its environment. It is one of the few mammals, other than man, capable of modifying habitat to suit its needs. They instinctively build dams and lodges from any available materials such as tree branches, mud, and stone.

## Conflict Resolution

Beaver activity emanating from county-owned property and resulting in conflict will be evaluated by the Department of Recreation and Parks Natural Resource Division for the existence of, or potential of:

- impact to public health and safety
- impact to private property
- impact to public infrastructure
- impact to public parks and facilities

The significance of these impacts will determine the type of management action taken. Any action taken will be based on proven wildlife management techniques, appropriate animal welfare concerns, and applicable laws and regulations.

It is important to remember that one function of county parks and open space lands is to provide habitat for wildlife. These areas are one of the few places left in the county where wildlife can live. In most cases, damage done to trees on county-owned lands is accepted as part of having beavers.



## Damage Prevention and Control

**Exclusion** involves fencing small critical areas such as culverts, drains, or other areas, and individual trees. A low, sturdy fence, three feet high, can keep a beaver out of an area. When fencing around an individual tree, a simple fence 3-4 feet high made of heavy wire mesh can prevent damage. The fence should be approximately eight to 10 inches from the plant and can be supported by driving metal rods into the ground.

**Cultural methods and habitat modification** include the elimination food sources such as trees and other woody vegetation and harassment of beaver by repeatedly destroying dams and removing food caches, or installing a pond leveler which regulates the water level of the beaver pond. These methods are not always practical in every situation and have varying success rates. Permits may be required.

**Trapping** of all wildlife is regulated by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources. State law provides for a legal winter trapping season for beaver on private and state-owned lands. State law also provides for regulated trapping outside the normal season; however, a permit must be secured from the Maryland Department of Natural Resources. State law also requires that captured beaver be destroyed by euthanasia and not relocated. Wildlife Cooperators are available to assist private landowners in dealing with nuisance

beaver. These individuals are certified by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources and able to handle nuisance wildlife situations. It is illegal to trap beaver on county-owned lands, unless permission has been granted by the Appointing Authority.



## Useful Numbers

**Howard County Recreation and Parks  
Natural Resource Manager  
410-313-4724**

**Maryland Department of Natural  
Resources  
Wildlife & Heritage Division  
410-836-4557 or 301-258-7308**

**U.S. Department of Agriculture  
APHIS - Wildlife Service  
Nuisance Wildlife Information Line  
1-877-463-6497**