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BEAVER DAMAGE CONTROL

by

James E. Miller
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University of Arkansas

The beaver (Castor canadensis), our largest North American rodent, is praised by many as being a natural conservationist; however, to others he is a destructive nuisance and pest. In many chronicles, the beaver is lauded to be one of the resources that speeded up the settling of our Great Northwest Territory. Certainly, such explorers as Lewis and Clark depended greatly upon the beaver hide for revenue as well as varter.

Beaver pelts were a valuable resource for many years and were avidly sought by trappers until beaver in many areas were virtually trapped out. In fact, many states were practically devoid of beaver until the late 1940's; any beaver that remained were in the most inaccessible areas. Fur prices began to decline because of various reasons--trappers became fewer and beaver populations were slow to increase. However, with assistance from various sources, beaver were restocked in many states, and in some states, the changing land use provided increased aquatic habitat.

With the decline in fur prices, trapping became a lost art and through restocking efforts, beaver have now become numerous. They now sometimes cause serious economic damage in many areas. Admittedly, beaver are water conservationists, and their ponds create ideal habitat for various wildlife species, such as waterfowl, shorebirds, muskrats, otter and various other vertebrates and invertebrates. However, their water conserving habits have caused, in some areas, such damage as flooded homes, roads, croplands, and timberlands. They cause tremendous problems for many fish farmers and reservoir owners when they need to release water held for crop production purposes.

Beaver create problems on much timberland in Arkansas, particularly the hardwood bottoms. In many cases, where forest lands are intensively managed for pine, beaver can cause considerable damage where they either flood or girdle, cut, or feed on pine trees near the pond. Beaver also create problems on some small recreational streams where they cut trees along each side of the stream and hinder boating.

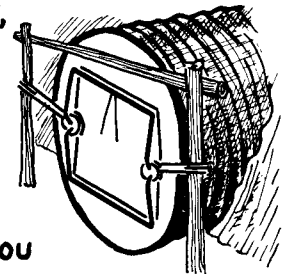
Much of the interest in beaver control is in the delta section where intensive farming is the rule. Beaver cause the most extensive damage by damming drainage ditches, canals, and stopping up drain pipes which drastically inhibit the necessary water control that landowners need.

There are many complaints from duck clubs which flood green timber reservoirs. When the time comes to drain the water where the trees will continue to grow, the beaver will not let the water be drained.

There are other problems which often arise, such as the flooding of crops because of recently constructed beaver dams and some damage from beaver eating corn or soybean crops that are planted near ponds or streams where beaver are prevalent. They also cause extensive damage by burrowing in reservoirs and levees.

WHEN BEAVER ARE STOPPING UP DRAIN PIPE, PREVENTING DRAINAGE -

1. CLEAN OUT PIPE TO GET WATER FLOWING THROUGH FREELY.
2. SET TRAP AT SAME LEVEL OF DRAIN PIPE ENTRANCE, BUT FAR ENOUGH AWAY TO CLEAR TRAP, WHEN BEAVER ENTERS.
3. PUT STAKES ON EITHER SIDE TO MAKE BEAVER ENTER TRAP THE WAY YOU WANT HIM TO.



Beaver will continue to cause problems to farmers and landowners in any region of abundant aquatic habitat where intensive farming is carried out, unless landowners learn how to control them.

Control Methods

Destruction of Dam and Lodge

Many people, when confronted with beaver problems, immediately think that destroying the dam will cause the beaver to leave. This seldom, if ever, works as beaver are extremely hard to discourage and are famous for their working habits. Generally, even with a small colony of only one family, their dam can be completely blown with dynamite one day and it will be rebuilt by the next morning. Sometimes, with a fairly new dam, the beaver will move, but only to the next strategic dam location up or down the stream or ditch, where they will construct another dam. Depending on conditions, stream flow, and length of residence by the beaver, they will often build several dams. It is not uncommon to find three or four dams along one-half mile of drainage ditch or stream.

Alteration of Habitat

Something that many people with beaver problems never think about is alteration of the habitat. On many drainage ditches or canals where beaver become a problem, they could be moved simply by cleaning up the food and construction material. This is particularly true where only young willow and cottonwood trees are in evidence. These species are fast growing and are favorite foods of the beaver. If they are not needed for a windbreak, they can be either removed or killed, thereby eliminating the basic food and construction material of the beaver. One way to prevent beaver problems in fish ponds and reservoirs is to keep the willow and cottonwoods cut or killed out.

New beaver colonies can occasionally be moved by burning, dynamiting, or otherwise destroying the lodge and the dam. However, this does not mean that they or another colony will not come back or move in if there is desirable habitat available.

Toxicants

There have been many attempts to find a practical, effective, and selective toxic agent with which beaver could be poisoned. However, to date no one has made available any baiting method or toxic agent that is species selective for beaver. The greatest problem in using toxic baits is the varied and unpredictable feeding habits of the beaver. Beaver do not form habitual eating habits, as does the muskrat. A beaver is quite mobile and will oftentimes not return to one particular food source for 2 or 3 weeks. In other words, just because you see fresh beaver cuttings on a tree today, that does not mean he will necessarily return to feed on the same tree the next night or two. Therefore, if you had some toxicant that could be applied to trees, you would have to treat all trees that are a possible food source, or that the beaver might cut on. At the time of this publication, there are no toxicants that have been proven to be effective, practical, and species selective for beaver control.

Trapping

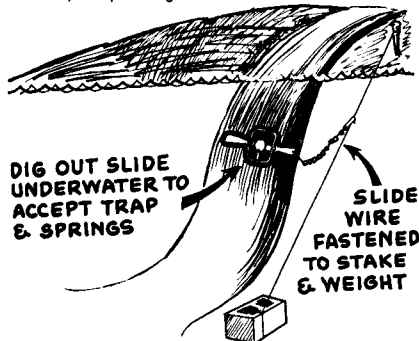
Presently, trapping is the only effective and practical method of beaver control that is available. Trapping of beaver, however, is generally not as easy or productive as for other mammals, such as mink or muskrats. There are several reasons for this, with the most basic being that beaver are not usually as concentrated and are more territorial than muskrats. Also, beaver are apparently more intelligent, wary, and trap-shy than most of the other rodents.

However, with a good knowledge of beaver habits, ability to read signs, and armed with the proper trap, most anyone with some outdoor savvy can effectively trap beaver. Beaver can be trapped at any time of the year by the landowner on his place or on land controlled by him to protect his livestock, poultry, crops, etc., from damage in most states.

Trap Placement

The proper place to set traps, where they will catch beaver, is often misunderstood.

Many people not familiar with beaver habits attempt to catch beaver with the trap placed above water. This type of set is difficult to make properly and often catches some other animals or is prematurely thrown.



**HOLE TORN THROUGH DAM
RELEASING WATER**



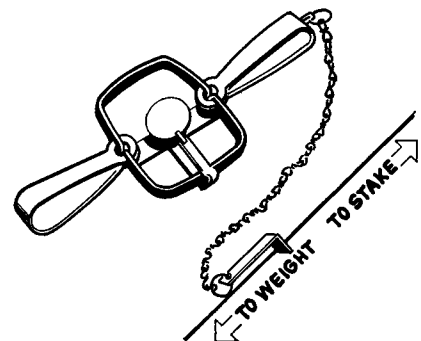
Initially, the trap should be placed in a location that the beaver is using, such as a slide or where the beaver is going beneath a log or where he is crossing a levee between two ponds. These sets are the most ideal for the long spring-type trap; however, beaver can be effectively trapped with this type of trap by precise placement in the den or lodge entrance. For the long spring trap to be most effective, many trappers like to set the trap underwater at the slide entrance or in the run. This type of trap

should be set so the pan and springs are inconspicuous by covering them with leaves, etc. Be sure that no sticks or clods of mud can prevent the trap from operating properly. With the long spring trap, success depends on the trap being set so the beaver gets a foot into the trap.

Some trappers use baits or lures made from the castor glands of the beaver or from sweetgum resin. However, if the trap is properly placed and set, baits or lures are not needed.

The type of trap to use depends on the individual doing the trapping; however, if the long spring type of steel trap is to be used, never attempt to trap a beaver with a trap size smaller than No. 3. Also, if the long spring type trap is used, it should be a drown set to prevent the beaver from pulling free or twisting its toes or foot off and escaping.

There are several different methods of making a drown set. One of the most practical is to use a slide wire with a heavy weight attached to one end. The other end of the slide wire is threaded through one hole in a small piece of 1-inch angle iron that has the trap chain attached on the other leg of the angle. The end of the wire is tied to a tree or stake driven into the bank.

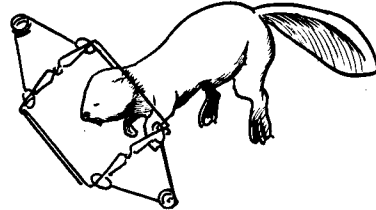
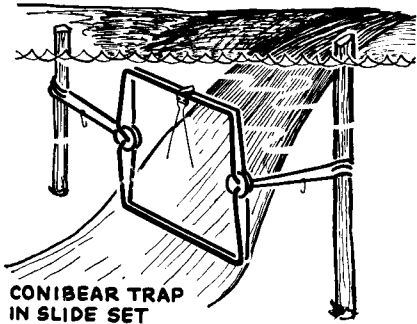
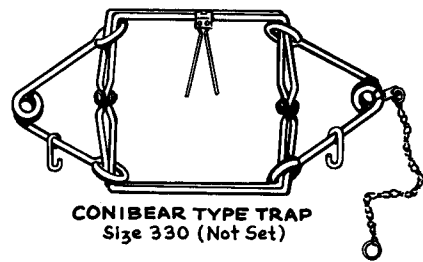


**No. 3 or 4 double spring steel trap
attached to wire for drown set.**

The principle of this method is that the heavy weight (approximately 20 pounds) with wire attached is thrown out into the deep water. With the other end tied securely, when the beaver gets into the trap, the angle iron with trap attached will slide downward into the deep water when the beaver dives. He will soon drown, because the angle iron will not slide back up the wire due to the angle and because his pulling on it will bend the wire.

Conibear-Type Traps

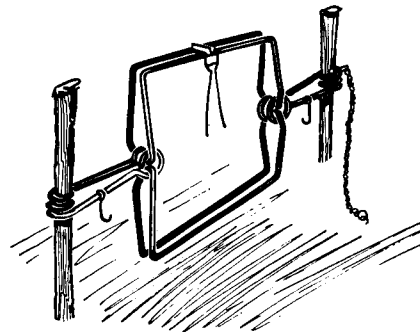
Another type of trap that has been proven extremely effective and humane is the Conibear-type Size 330. This trap can be set in deep or shallow water with equal effectiveness and is easier to set and requires less time and equipment than the drown set with long spring traps. The Conibear-type trap is both practical and efficient and lends itself to a greater variety of sets. It can be set in the dam, the burrow or lodge entrance, in runs, in front of drain pipes, or beneath slides. The reason the trap is adaptable to so many different sets is that it is so



Most of the time a beaver caught in a Conibear 330 will be caught in this manner—just behind the head, on the neck or front shoulders.

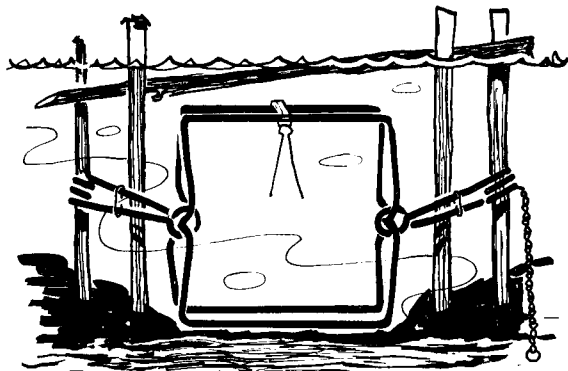
designed that when properly set, the beaver must swim through the trap to get to his destination, but, when the trap trigger is thrown, it kills the beaver almost instantly. This is the type of trap that most professional beaver trappers are presently using because of its effectiveness, its mobility, the ease of setting, and the fact that no beaver that gets into this trap will escape.

When initially purchased, the Conibear-type trap size 330 often comes with some round wire coils; these are not necessary equipment and unless properly utilized can be dangerous. It is best to disregard the use of these; however, the two safety catches that are attached to the trap must be carefully utilized. This trap can be set with the hands; however, for anyone not familiar with setting it by hand, the easiest way to depress the springs and set the trap is by utilizing a small, strong rope. The rope should be run through each of the spring eyes on one side of the trap, then around and back through each spring eye. The rope can then be pulled right depressing the trap and allowing the safety catch to be placed across the two spring wires. The other side of the trap is set the same way. Then, with both springs depressed and with safety catches in place, the trap itself is set, placing the trigger catch over the groove at the top of the two wires which the beaver will trip. When this trap is set, it should be staked down securely through the back part of each spring eye. After the trap is properly set and staked down, the two safety catches are removed and the trap is now ready to catch a beaver. Caution should be taken not to get a foot or hand into the trap after safety catches are removed.

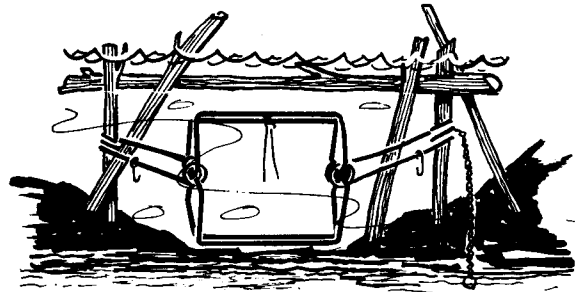


This is the basic way of setting and staking a Conibear 330 trap. Additional stakes are normally used.

When setting a Conibear-type trap, it often helps to use a few stakes on either side of the trap to guide the beaver into the trap rather than allowing him to swim around it. It also helps in making a dive set to place a stake between the spring arms on each side so as to make a support for the dive stick and also to guide the beaver into the trap.



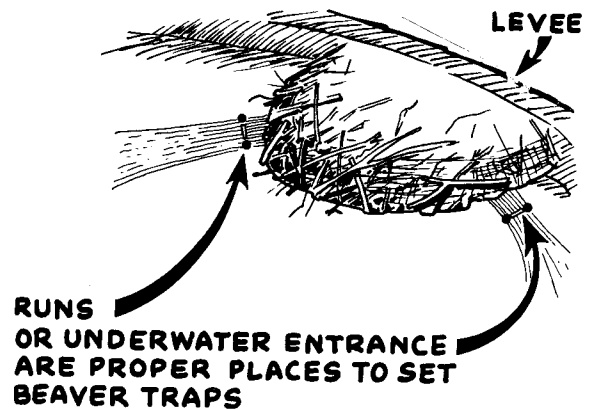
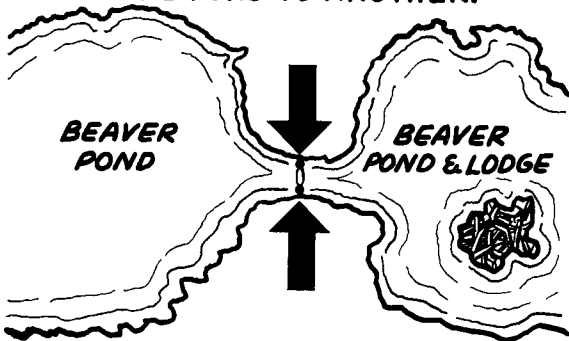
DIVE SET CONIBEAR WITH SAFETY CATCHES STILL ON. *Note: Will not catch Beaver with safety catches on.*



CONIBEAR TRAP SET WITH SAFETY CATCHES REMOVED-READY TO CATCH BEAVER.

Beaver are not so much creatures of habit in their feeding activity as they are in the routes of travel. In other words, you cannot always depend on their returning to any one particular food source, but they will make it a habit to use the same "runs," slides, trails, lodge, and burrow entrances. Therefore, these are the best places to set traps. These strategic places can often be easily found in relatively shallow areas by simply putting on hip boots or waders and wading the area and feeling out the runs and burrow entrances. Runs and burrow entrances that are being utilized by beaver will be somewhat "beaten out," that is, they will often be 2 to 18 inches deeper than the surrounding bottom and the bottom of these runs will be hard packed, much like a cow trail in a pasture. When setting the conibear-type trap in runs or trails, always set the trap so that it is on the bottom of the trail or run. Otherwise the beaver will swim under the trap. When trapping beaver or any other animal, traps should be run and checked daily to prevent the animal from being damaged or suffering if it has not drowned.

STRATEGIC & IDEAL PLACE TO SET CONIBEAR BEAVER TRAP-THE TRAP WILL CATCH BEAVER MOVING FROM ONE POND TO ANOTHER.



Summary

Beaver in some areas and in some streams will never cause a great deal of economic damage to landowners; however, in regions of extensive agricultural croplands they will be a sporadic source of serious damage. In these areas the beaver must be controlled, therefore, knowing something about the beaver, his habits and the correct methods of control, the landowner can either control this animal or allow the damage to continue.