

HB 2843 - Frequently Asked Questions

Beaver Trapping/Hunting Closure on Federally-managed Public Lands (FMPLs)

Under HB 2843, can the public still trap and hunt beavers on state and county public lands, private lands and Tribal lands?

Yes. This bill only applies to federally-managed public lands (FMPL), or 50% of the state. Beaver trapping and hunting would still be allowed on state and county public lands, and on private lands with permission of the landowner. Rules on Tribal lands are under jurisdiction of the Tribe.

What is the impact of this bill?

Over four million Oregonians and countless fish and wildlife would benefit from expanded beaver numbers and distributions as fish and wildlife habitat, water quality and stream flows improve and natural fire breaks are created. Benefits would be in the 100s of millions of dollars. Less than 170 people statewide trap and hunt beaver under the furbearer regulations and would no longer be able to so on FMPLs.

How many beaver are there in Oregon?

We don't know. The only information on beaver numbers comes from the number killed and reported. Between 2000 and 2018 more than 48,000 beavers were reported to ODFW as killed under the furbearer regulations and more than 10,000 were killed by Wildlife Services. 58,000 is a minimum number because not all human-caused mortality is reported and no numbers exist for death by natural causes.

Why are beaver valuable to Oregonians?

Beaver create and maintain habitat that enhances fishing, hunting, and wildlife viewing and creates natural fire breaks, increases water quality and stream flows and improves and expands fish and wildlife habitat. A 2009 report commissioned by ODFW and Travel Oregon found that the economic returns of fishing, hunting, wildlife viewing, and shellfishing were \$2.8 billion. A 2016 report commissioned by the state legislature revealed that the majority of Oregonians are concerned about habitat loss, lack of water, low/declining fish populations, urban sprawl, and conservation and management of resources in general.

How do beaver help farmers and ranchers, and cities and towns?

Farmers and ranchers need water during to grow crops and raise livestock. Cities and towns need dependable high-quality water, and drinking water for many Oregonians comes from national forests. Beaver-created habitats temporarily store water in ponds and in the ground, which is then slowly and sustainably released. Because the ponds create conditions that allow for regular groundwater recharge, benefits are maintained over time. This temporary storage helps offset impacts of drought, decreases the frequency and magnitude of downstream flooding, and improves water quality (i.e. stream temperatures, turbidity) and stream flows.

How do beaver help with wildfires?

Beaver create and maintain wetlands, wet meadows, and ponds which are natural fire breaks. The areas provide refuge for livestock and wildlife during fires and habitat post-fire which are critical for helping wildlife survive the winter. Because vegetation remains, these areas trap soil eroding from surrounding hillsides post wildfire and prevent it from reaching the streams, helping to protect water quality.

How do beaver help native fish?

Beaver create habitat that improve the function and diversity of the biological and physical systems native fish need to survive and thrive. Ponds provide critical winter rearing habitat for juvenile Coho salmon. Ponds and wetlands temporarily store surface and groundwater which later contribute to cooler stream temperatures

(currently, more than 23,000 miles of Oregon streams are too warm). Improved riparian conditions result in greater vegetation and insect life, which enhances food sources for native fish.

How do beaver help with climate change?

Wetlands and wet meadows created by beaver are natural carbon capture-and-store areas that extract large amounts of carbon from the atmosphere via photosynthesis, a natural process that helps draw down carbon by storing it in roots and decaying matter below ground, in riparian vegetation, and in beaver ponds.

Beaver habitat improves the ability of fish and wildlife to survive climate changes. Their habitats are more stable and less sensitive to short-term climate variability because they contain reservoirs of surface and groundwater that buffer habitats from drought, and they create conditions for groundwater recharge to occur during flooding. As a result, habitat changes are more gradual, giving wildlife time to both adapt and relocate.

Beaver ponds, wetlands, and wet meadows hold water in storage and slowly release it, partially offsetting declines in stream flows and water quality related to declining snowpack and spring melt. These natural fire breaks create safety zones for wildlife to survive extreme fire events that are expected to increase with climate change and can help slow the speed that fire moves across the landscape.

How do you deal with beaver-human conflicts such as blocked culverts?

Most beaver-human conflicts can be solved through non-lethal means using human ingenuity and knowledge about beaver. Understanding beaver behavior has led to the development of proven coexistence strategies that can eliminate conflicts for the long-term and are more cost-effective than repetitive trapping because removal just makes the habitat available to another family of beaver—thus compounding potential for infrastructure damage and costs over time.

How does beaver trapping and hunting hurt Oregonians and its fish and wildlife?

Maintaining family units is key for expanding populations, successful dam building and maintenance, dispersal, and habitat creation. Trapping and hunting can eliminate entire colonies in one season. As a result, when the dams fail, they are not repaired. The ponds drain, water tables drop, water quality declines, wetlands and wet meadows begin converting to drier species and fish and wildlife habitat decreases. Even if some beaver remain, there is a lag between birth, adulthood, dispersal and finding a mate which limits creation and maintenance of habitat and its benefits. Those that remain are vulnerable to trapping and hunting pressures the following year in addition to all the other mortality causes.

How does beaver trapping and hunting differ from wild carnivore predation on beaver?

The beaver trapping and hunting season under ODFW furbearer regulations occurs in the winter and overlaps the beaver breeding and pregnancy season because the fur quality is best. Once a trap is set a trapper can leave and return at leisure leaving the trap on the landscape 24/7 until removed or an animal is caught. Whole colonies can be removed in a single season leaving dams unattended, which then fall into disrepair and fail, causing habitat benefits to be lost. Wild carnivore predation is an opportunistic kill and unlikely to remove an entire colony. Therefore, the habitat benefits remain because the remaining beaver are able to maintain their dams and expand their numbers.

HB 2843 Online: <https://olis.oregonlegislature.gov/liz/2021R1/Measures/Overview/HB2843>

Contact: Rep Pam Marsh, Rep.PamMarsh@oregonlegislature.gov, 503-986-1405