

Beaver Coexistence: A Lesson in Innovation, Adaptation, and Compromise

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In urban and rural environs, beavers working to engineer ecosystems often encounter pushback from humans. Homes, roads, and other infrastructure that occupy historic floodplains and wetlands are particularly susceptible to impacts when beavers work on stream restoration of their own. While it is widely accepted that beaver ponds benefit native fish species, water quality, and water quantity, our human-modified stream systems and declining salmon runs raise a growing number of questions about how humans can best coexist with aquatic habitats. Beaver coexistence flow devices have been a happy compromise to balance the needs of people, beavers, and the other animals that call beaver ponds home. In order to retain more beavers on the landscape and support ecosystem resilience, Beavers Northwest has implemented flow devices and other coexistence practices across a wide geographic region in Washington State. Beavers Northwest has worked closely with regulators and other organizations to develop best management practices for maintaining natural processes that occur at beaver dams including fish passage.

In this talk, we will dive into the best practices and innovations for flow devices to meet the varied needs of people, beavers, and fish. These adaptive management strategies support beaver powered restoration, serving as vital tools for any practitioners that have encountered wanted or unwanted beaver impacts. These examples will be widely transferrable to other regions working to address the balance between beaver and human modified systems with strategies to plan for, adapt to, and coexist with beavers.

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