

Problem Beaver Compensation

A Discussion Paper

NLTA September, 2014

Problem wildlife interactions between beavers and humans occur frequently, and such problems increase in frequency where beaver populations increase significantly, and are compounded by human encroachment on beaver habitat. Beaver population increases typically are correlated to lower beaver pelt price, which reduces trapping effort and harvest.

The Canadian wild fur industry has witnessed a dramatic price drop in 2014 due to political and domestic disruptions in the two largest wild fur markets, Russia and China. Beavers typically are a difficult species to market since they are a costly and labor-intensive species to dress (process) for garment production. This generally represses overall beaver pelt prices. The most recent North American fur auction (September 2014) saw beavers sell at an average price of \$12.40, before deductions. This price is well below production cost to the producer.

In many instances in recent years, trappers handling problem beaver incidents on their traplines operated at best on a break-even financial basis. This latest market downturn, which typically can last for several years, will witness problem beaver trappers operating at a loss. It will most certainly mean a significant reduction in beaver harvest effort, and a consequent increase in beaver populations and the resulting problem animal situations.

Consider also that most beaver trappers also harvest other furbearers. In terms of dollar value per effort, beavers are worth considerably less than most other furbearers. This occurs because beaver trapping and pelt preparation are significantly more labour-intensive and time-consuming than are most other furbearers. In simplified terms, a trapper can process \$100 value of mink in the equivalent time to process \$20 value of beaver. Consequently, at the peak of the fall harvesting season, most trappers concentrate their harvest toward the most valuable and more easily processed species, and leave beaver harvesting to later in the season. It can pose an additional financial loss to such trappers if they are expected to give a higher priority to problem beaver control at peak trapping season. A further complication related to this involves the open trapping system for other furbearers in this province, and the consequent need for trappers to be available to compete for such furs at peak trapping time.

A similar example can be seen in the commercial fishery, such as when crab prices are low. Fishermen will opt to not fish crab and target other more valuable species. A trapper's ability to direct his or her harvest to the most lucrative species should not be impeded by an obligatory response to problem beaver, or if such is the case, meaningful compensation should be awarded for the commission of this public service.

A trapper must not be expected to address problem beavers on his/her trapline (at personal expense) outside of the trapping season under threat of forfeiture of the trapline for failure to do so. Several reports of this have recently been received from NLTA members.

In critical problem beaver situations involving issues of health, safety and/or imminent infrastructure damage, where live-trapping and translocation efforts by resource personnel are unsuccessful, or are otherwise ineffective, the trapline holder, or other trapper where there are no registered traplines, may be hired to remove the offending animals. In such cases outside the trapping season, and when requested by the resource agency to resolve a problem situation, a trapper should be compensated by the crown at a set rate per beaver harvested.

In situations during the open trapping season, when requested by the resource agency to resolve a problem situation, a trapper should be compensated by the crown at a set rate per problem colony, supplementary to pelt value. The rates of compensatory remuneration should be established in accordance with those established in some other Canadian jurisdictions (see Appendix 1).

Finally, whatever changes are implemented, all concerned government agencies - Wildlife Division, Natural Resources and Fish and Wildlife Enforcement Division - should all be aware of any policy changes and clearly understand their respective roles. To date, there still exists confusion concerning policy and agency roles.

Summary:

It is essential that NL resource managers be cognizant of the facts that beaver problem removal can impose financial loss and negatively affect harvest effort of other more valuable furbearers by trappers, further exacerbating the financial loss. Other Canadian jurisdictions, even those without registered traplines, offer a meaningful compensation rate for problem beaver removal by trappers in recognition of the valuable public service they routinely provide. Such an investment will mitigate against exploding beaver populations during depressed pelt price periods, and thereby reduce the financial cost to the crown in potential infrastructure damage and engagement of resource agency staff in problem resolution.

The time is long overdue that this province initiates a satisfactory remuneration package to offset personal financial loss by trappers performing this valuable public service.

APPENDIX 1*

N.S. Trapper: charges \$75 for initial assessment and live trap deployment if assessment determines required - subsequent daily visits \$75/day + \$150/live bvr. removed. Unspecified mileage charged. Note Comstock live traps are \$400 value each.

Ont. Trapper # 1: charges \$300 per live bvr. removed and \$75 per dead one + unspecified mileage

Ont. Trapper #2: charges \$100 per live bvr. removed + unspecified mileage

Ont. Trapper # 3: charges \$80 per dead bvr. removed + unspecified mileage

Dryden (Ont.) trapper council members: charge \$65 per dead bvr. removed, \$15 per dam breaching, and 54.5 cents/km. mileage

Both Nova Scotia and Ont. governments have the ability to enter into contracts with trappers to do nuisance beaver removal

*The above rates were quoted by various trappers who were polled by NLTA on the Canadian National Trappers Alliance trapper talk forum in spring of 2014 and may be viewed at the following links:

<http://www.trapper.ca/cnta/viewtopic.php?f=3&t=6213> AND

<http://www.trapper.ca/cnta/viewtopic.php?f=1&t=9274&hilit=beaver+compensation>

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