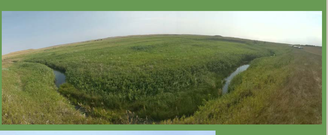
Montana Beaver Working Group

Connecting and providing resources to people interested in the role of beavers in watershed and riparian health

Stories and News

Build It and They Will Come (and get right to work)

Lewistown LTPBR workshop projects draws beavers, improves water storage and habitat



August 2019
(photo by Joe Wheaton)

November 2020
(photo by Robert Griffin)

Fergus County landowner Robert Griffin describes himself as a landowner with an interest in improving habitat, focusing his attention on cultivating native vegetation that will support mule deer, songbirds, upland game birds, and more. He's worked with the Sage Grouse Initiative to protect and enhance prime winter habitat for the Greater Sage-Grouse provided by dense, tall sagebrush on about half of his property. But lately he and his neighbor were looking at how to improve natural water storage on the streams they share, particularly a spring-fed stream that runs year-round and provides essential water when everything else dries up in late summer. They talked about the missing link on the landscape, the beaver, and commented more than once that, "When we have beavers, our work here will be done."

That happened a lot faster than they anticipated, thanks to work completed on both their places as part of a Low-Tech, Process-Based Restoration (LTPBR) workshop sponsored by the NRCS' Working Lands for Wildlife partnership and led by Joe Wheaton and Jeremy Maestas in August 2019. Dr. Wheaton notes that the beaver-dam analogs and post-assisted log structures were intended primarily as hands-on training tools, not a strategic design aimed at maximizing the footprint and likelihood that beaver take over and expand. Indeed, the landowners weren't aware of beavers inhabiting the area at the time.

> *"The P in LTPBR is process, and the key process here is beaver dam activity."*
> -Joe Wheaton

Landowners Robert and Dede Griffin participating in LTPBR workshop (photo by Jeremy Maestas)

Within a week after the workshop project, beavers did move in and immediately began improving and adding to the structures. They doubled the number of structures and converted all to full dams, eventually creating a series of ponds with 14 dams along 1/3 of a river mile, building with mud, grass, and rushes. Despite limited access to woody food sources, the beavers survived the winter and continued to expand their habitat this year. Now, in Robert's words, "They're holding back enormous amounts of water, and the plant communities are starting to change, including more rushes and cattails.

Today, the ponded water extends upstream from the spring, and the creek has standing water all year—providing an opportunity for controlled cattle-watering accompanied by riparian corridor protection. Robert reports seeing up to 30 drake mallards at once in the new ponds, as well as several new bird species, including tundra swan and American bittern.

Any problems from new beaver neighbors? Although the beavers consumed a row of 100 buffaloberry shrubs Robert and his wife carefully established and protected from deer on their property, he notes that they are likely to regrow from their rootstock. "It's just part of having beavers," he notes, adding that they have used wire-wrapping and electric fencing to protect valuable apple trees and landmark cottonwoods. "With a little management and a little fencing, we get a lot of improvement," he observes, noting that the benefits include expanded wildlife habitat and grass for cattle.

> *"We are thrilled with all the water that is being held back on the landscape."*
> -Robert Griffin

Beavers moved in within a week and immediately began expanding the human-built structures, in some cases dramatically. This 20-foot-wide beaver dam began as a 6-foot-wide BDA. (photo by Robert Griffin)

UPCOMING EVENT

ASWM-BLM Beaver Restoration Webinar #4: Addressing Common Barriers and Objections to Beaver Restoration Work

Thursday, Dec. 10, 1:00-2:30 pm MST

Presenters: Wally MacFarlane, Utah State University and Justin Jimenez, U.S. Bureau of Land Management

Photo by Sarah Bates

This fourth webinar in the ASWM-BLM Beaver Restoration Webinar Series focuses on common barriers to beaver restoration and beaver dam analog (BDA) work and when/how these barriers can be overcome. Common local landowner concerns include the taking of water from downstream water users, the potential for infrastructure damage, and a general intolerance for dam building activities. Common barriers to project success include long delays associated with the NEPA process and inability to sustain strong, diverse and long-lasting project partners. This webinar will provide case studies from Utah and Idaho and will provide insights on best management practices for successful beaver restoration and BDA work.

Information and link to register for this webinar here: https://www.aswm.org/aswm/aswm-webinarscalls/3354-beaver-restoration-webinar-series

RESOURCES

Working With Beaver for Riparian Health: How University Research Supports Conservation and Management
Recorded webinar from the November 18 Institute on Ecosystems Rough Cut Seminar, featuring presentations from Montana University System researchers Jamie McEvoy, Andrew Bobst, and Andrew Lahr.
Recorded webinar available here

Beavers Without Borders
A beautifully produced short film produced by the U.K.-based Beaver Trust, **available to stream here**. Highly recommended!

Beaver Tales
A series of blogs telling stories of beaver on the landscape and how they've shaped their habitat through engineering of dams and lodges, courtesy of Beaver Works Oregon
Blogs and many more resources available here

Why wouldn't we share one more beautiful photo of the Ninemile Valley in western Montana, where Trout Unlimited recently completed the fourth phase of its placer mine reclamation work? This project, which incorporates beaver habitat (and has already drawn enthusiastic beaver residents) moved 80,000 cubic yards of placer-mined material, constructed 3,000 feet of Ninemile Creek, floodplain, wetlands, and side channels. (Photo courtesy Paul Parson, Trout Unlimited)

Please send stories, upcoming events, and other resources to:
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MT Beaver Working Group newsletters are posted online at:
nwf.org/WorkingWithBeavers