

## An Eager Beaver Impeder? Hot Dam!

Thanks to a device that prevents flooding caused by their building, the beavers of Mystic, Conn., won't face lethal trapping

BY ALEXANDRA KLEINKOPF

"It was a situation that was gradually getting worse," says John Silsby, director of parks and recreation at Connecticut's Groton Parks. At the onset of spring this year, the beaver dam in Pequot Woods began flooding the adjacent hiking trail, posing a problem for visitors and park officials.

Though Silsby says the park had never trapped or killed any beavers in the past, locals became concerned for the welfare of the bucktoothed buddies, and turned up the heat on park officials to solve the problem humanely.

Enter Wild Neighbors, a Connecticut-based branch of the urban wildlife department of The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS). Its mission is to help people coexist harmoniously with wildlife by providing lasting solutions, helping people handle everything from repelling raccoons from rubbish bins, to deterring deer from dining on garden foliage ... and in this case, baffling beavers building blockades.

According to Sean Guinan, urban wildlife program coordinator at the HSUS, trapping and killing solve nothing. "Ultimately, when animals are removed from the environment, it opens up a niche—it opens up an opportunity for others to move in," he explains, "and very shortly afterward, another colony or another family of beavers just slide right into that place."

Beaver trapping and dam destruction can also have serious implications for the ecosystem. "By having the dam in place," says Guinan, "it creates wetland habitat. This country spends probably hundreds of millions of dollars on creating wetland habitats, when in fact, beavers are doing it for us." He explains



Becca DeWeerd and Skip Hilliker of The HSUS lower a beaver impeder into the water. The rectangular mesh "cage" around the pipe prevents beavers from plugging it up with debris, so water will continue to flow through the dam, and the nearby road will no longer flood. LAURA SIMON/THE HSUS

that wetlands make life possible for an array of species, while dams serve as water filters, removing impurities from rivers and streams.

Wild Neighbors solves flooding by leaving the beavers in place and running a long, flexible plastic pipe, less than a foot in diameter, through the dam. The pipe's ends are covered in wire mesh caging, which prevents beavers from plugging the holes. Water flows from one side to the other, keeping river levels high enough for beavers and wetlands to thrive, but low enough that flooding is averted.

The beaver impeder have been installed in nearly 200 public and private locations in several states.

The result? "They've been working great!" Guinan says, "See, the beauty of these devices is that they're highly successful. In a recent survey, we had about an 89 to 92 percent success rate."

That's a big improvement over traditional trap-and-kill methods, which usually lead to the arrival of other beavers and cost around \$200 per animal. Depending on the size of the job, the beaver impeder costs from \$400 to \$900—well below the cost of trapping and killing year after year.

Jan Marineau, superintendent of water pollution control in Plainville, Conn., can testify to that: Wild Neighbors fitted the Pequabuck River with an impeder back in 2001. Marineau says the town is "very, very pleased with it." In a town that originally employed trap-and-kill methods to deal with beaver-induced flooding, Marineau now rests easy knowing that beaver traps no longer threaten other wildlife ... or unsuspecting dogs, for that matter.

It was much the same for the town of Bethany, Conn., whose beaver baffle system has been a success for nearly two years. Where the town's Public Works department would originally tear down dam after dam to deal with the flooding of a nearby soccer field, First Selectwoman Derry Gorski explains that Wild Neighbors' solution has made the beavers a public attraction. "The beavers have been terrific," she says, "People come just to see them."

Even when the beavers began felling trees along a walking path, Wild Neighbors had a solution. By wrapping the bottom five feet of the tree trunks in barely noticeable wire mesh, the chewing was put to a halt, and Bethany's "timberrrrr!" problem was resolved.

And for towns that still trap and kill, that's certainly something to chew on. **AS**

