

## For Information Only

### Management of Nuisance Beavers

Presented To:	Operations Committee
Presented:	Monday, Aug 11, 2014
Report Date	Wednesday, Jul 23, 2014
Type:	Managers' Reports

### Recommendation

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## Background

Over the past several years staff and Council have received an increasing number of calls related to the management of nuisance beavers throughout the City. Based on this, staff was asked to prepare an information report detailing the City's responsibilities on these matters. The report outlines the current policy, practice, legislative requirements and property owner responsibilities.

### General Information

The north american beaver has been a challenge for municipalities and private property owners for a number of years. Beavers are large rodents that can grow to be 1.2 m in length and weigh up to 30 kgs. They are characterized by features adapted to their aquatic environments such as: webbed feet, dense underfur and large front teeth. They are most active in the fall, working to store enough food (piled outside the lodge) to sustain them through the winter. Their diets include the bark of trees, water plants (pond lilies and cattail roots), shrubs, saplings, grasses, herbs, leaves and fruit. A family of five or six beavers may require in excess of one half hectare of dense poplar trees for its winter food supply.

Beavers construct living areas, called lodges, in lakes, rivers and creeks. A lodge consists of a single room with a floor above the water surface and an underwater tunnel for access. Beaver dams expand the size of the pool around the lodge so the water is deep enough to remain unfrozen along the bottom all winter, which is important so the beavers can still enter and exit the lodge.

The construction activity of beavers can be beneficial, but also cause problems in urbanized areas. Beaver dams can create important wetland habitat for waterfowl and other wildlife, regulate high flow conditions during storm events and reduce downstream bank erosion. In urban areas beaver activity has the potential to cause serious damage to private property and municipal infrastructure (roads, bridges, and culverts). In

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addition, residents may be troubled by aesthetic damage caused by the removal of trees from parklands and their property. Finding the balance between human activities and wildlife has been very difficult at times.

Management of nuisance beavers is governed by several pieces of legislation including the Canadian Fisheries Act, Lakes and Rivers Improvement Act, Public Lands Act, and Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act.

#### Current Practice for the Management of Nuisance Beavers

The management of nuisance beavers includes trapping and beaver dam removal as well as prevention, exclusion techniques such as tubular culvert protectors. Dam removal is generally ineffective without trapping the beaver, as beavers will usually repair the dam immediately. In the case of trapping and beaver dam removal, staff utilize the services of the Sudbury Area Trappers Council Inc., who in turn call the trapper responsible for the area to complete the work. As part of the trapping process, the trapper sets up their traps and creates a small notch in the beaver dam to entice the beaver into the area to close the hole in the dam. The trappers continue with this process until they are confident they have removed all the nuisance beavers at this location, then the beaver dam can be removed. The time required for this process can range from a few days to several weeks depending on complexity. The City only uses trappers that are licensed by the Ministry of Natural Resources for this purpose. The City's current contract with the Sudbury Area Trappers Council Inc. is for three years with the potential for two additional single year extensions. The three year average spending for trapping is \$50,000 annually.

Management of beaver on private land is the responsibility of individual landowners. Property owners may be held liable for damages as a result of inaction on their part to deal with a beaver dam on their property. The Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs states the following regarding the responsibility to remove beaver dams or natural blockages "If the watercourse was a municipal drain, your municipality has the authority and responsibility to maintain the drain. But municipalities have no authority to remove blockages from a natural watercourse. The conservation authority or Ministry of Natural Resources also has no authority to go onto private land to remove naturally-occurring blockages." (reference: [www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/landuse/drain-erefnatural.htm](http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/landuse/drain-erefnatural.htm)).

The municipality has the authority to remove beaver dams from private property if they represent a threat to municipal infrastructure. Should a beaver dam located on private property represent a threat to municipal infrastructure, a letter will be sent to that property owner requesting that the beaver dam be removed within a reasonable and defined timeframe. The letter will include details on how to address the problem, and the potential liability. If the property owner fails to respond within the deadline, the City will proceed to correct the problem and may pursue the recovery of these costs. Should the beaver dam be determined an emergency by City Staff, the City will act immediately to remove the beaver dam while providing as much notice to the property owner as possible.