
****HABITAT SELECTION, MOVEMENTS AND SURVIVAL OF DISPERSING JUVENILE BEAVERS IN SOUTHWESTERN MONTANA (ORAL AND POSTER)**

Torrey D. Ritter*, Department of Animal and Range Sciences, Montana State University, Bozeman
Lance B. McNew, Department of Animal and Range Sciences, Montana State University, Bozeman

The natural activities of beavers (*Castor canadensis*) effectively create or expand, and maintain, healthy riparian and wetland areas. Therefore, interest has increased among land and wildlife managers in the reintroduction of beavers into degraded riparian habitats as a proactive management option for natural restoration of these areas. However, there is a need for information regarding habitat selection by beavers in novel habitats to increase the likelihood that reintroduced beavers will colonize the area targeted for restoration. We are using cable snares to capture and radio tag dispersal age beavers in headwater streams of the Madison and Gallatin River drainages. We will relocate tagged beavers via handheld telemetry to obtain movement data from the moment the beavers leave their natal colony in the spring until they settle in a new location in the late summer and fall. Habitat characteristics representing vegetation, hydrology and geomorphology will be assessed at settlement locations as well as locations encountered but not settled to make inference on habitat conditions most important to dispersing beavers in selecting settlement sites. Eighteen beavers were radio tagged in the fall of 2015 representing 6 different streams in the study area. The 18 tagged beavers will be tracked through the spring and summer of 2016 and habitat conditions will be assessed based on their movements before another season of beaver trapping in the fall of 2016. Our analysis of habitat selection by juvenile beavers will guide future beaver restoration projects in this region by identifying release sites with the highest probability of success.