

Beavers and Their Role in Riparian Restoration in Montana (Oral and Poster)

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Beavers are one of the most influential species on Montana's landscapes. In the right situations and settings, their activities can greatly enhance patch-scale and landscape-scale biodiversity through the creation of complex, unique floodplain habitats. Beaver dams in headwater streams can slow the progression of snowmelt, prolonging water resources later into the year to benefit both wildlife and humans. Because of these potential benefits, reestablishing beavers in areas of their former range has become the focus of international efforts to restore degraded stream systems. In recognition of the importance of beavers on the landscape, in 2023 a team of fisheries and wildlife biologists with the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks released a white paper on the role of beavers in riparian restoration in Montana. This document covers the five major forms of beaver restoration: 1) conflict management, 2) land management changes, 3) beaver mimicry, 4) encouraging natural colonization, and 5) transplantation. The overarching goal of this document is to outline the settings and situations where beaver restoration can be implemented to achieve the benefits of beavers while discussing the limitations or pitfalls of restoration that can limit the use of these techniques. Using the white paper as a guide, this poster and presentation will highlight each of these five forms of beaver restoration and provide examples of current and future projects related to beaver restoration in Montana.