Beaver Biology, Laws and Regulations

South Carolina Department of Natural Resources
Furbearer Project
PO Box 167
Columbia, SC 29202
South Carolina Furbearers

Beaver
Bobcat
Coyote
Gray Fox
Long-tailed Weasel
Mink
Muskrat
Opossum
Raccoon
Red Fox
River Otter
Spotted Skunk
Striped Skunk
Beaver Biology

• Historically, the beaver was very abundant throughout South Carolina
  – Beavers were extensively trapped throughout this state as well as the U.S., and by the late 1800’s or early 1900’s, were eradicated, or at best, nearly absent in South Carolina
In the winter of 1940-1941, the USFWS released 6 beaver in the Carolina Sandhills NWR. Beaver from Sandhills NWR and natural immigrants from Georgia eventually repopulated the State.
Beaver Biology

• Largest rodent in North America
• Only species other than man that modifies its habitat
• Average weight: 35-40 lbs.
  - (can be much larger 60+ lbs.)
• Strictly vegetarians
  - Eats fresh woody stems, bark, leaves, aquatic vegetation
Beaver Biology

• Can remain underwater for up to 15 minutes.
• Breeding occurs in Winter
• Gestation period is 107 days
• Breed at 2-3 years old
• Litter size = 2-4, usually born in March
Beaver Biology

- Webbed feet, comb claw on each hind foot for grooming
- Flattened tail used as a rudder, support, and as a warning device, store fat, exchange heat.
- Inner lips allow beaver to carry sticks in their mouth and keep out water
- Can close ears and nose and have a transparent eye covering for use underwater
- Excellent smell and hearing, poor eyesight
Beaver Biology

• A typical colony consists of:
  – One mature male and female
  – One set of offspring from 1-2 years of age*
  – One set of offspring less than 1 year of age

• Usually there will be 4-8 beavers in a colony

• In good habitat 2 or more colonies may be adjacent to one another, yet they seldom overlap

*Older offspring will be forced out and disperse an average of 4 miles away from the colony
Beaver Biology

Dens are often dug into banks, entrance is usually at or below water level.

Bank den exposed by lowered water level.
Lodges constructed of woody debris are usually located in the water.
Benefits of Beaver

- Provide excellent habitat for a variety of species
  - Waterfowl, wading birds, fish, mammals, reptiles & amphibians
  - The wood duck has benefited greatly from the creation of nesting and brood rearing habitat
Problems with Beaver

• Timber or agricultural damage
• Flooding

• Blocked water control structures
• Weakened shorelines or dams
• Dock damage
Beaver Control - What can you legally do?

- Do nothing
- Non-lethal Control
- Hunting/Shooting
- Trapping
Beaver Control - What can you legally do?

- Non-lethal means
  - Exclusion (wire, fencing)
  - Repellents (taste, texture)
  - Water control devices
  - Dam removal
Beaver Control - What can you legally do?

• Destroying dams
  – Beaver dams can be removed without permits
  – Explosives can only be used by certain trained individuals
Beaver Control - What can you legally do?

• Hunting/Shooting*
  – No closed hunting season (hunting license required)
  – Depredation permit (no license required)
  – Shooting at night requires a depredation permit from a local DNR Officer
  – 100-yard exemption

*Check local ordinances regarding discharging firearms
Beaver Control - What can you legally do?

- Trapping
  Trapping season is Dec. 1 – Mar. 1
  Trap throughout the year with a Depredation Permit or within 100 yards of your residence.

*Generally recommend a shotgun with #4 buckshot or similar*
Legal Traps

- Snares

*In water sets only*
Legal Traps

- Conibear or Body-gripping traps

*In water or slide sets & in a vertical position without baits or lures*
Legal Traps

• Foothold traps

6 ½” or smaller in water
(5 ¾” or smaller on land)
Should be set as part of a submersion system.
Measuring Foothold Traps

Old nomenclature (#2 on land, #3 in water) is no longer used.

Measuring for Legal Traps

Inside jaw spread measured at widest point perpendicular to pivot points:

- 5.75” or smaller for land sets
- 6.50” or smaller for water sets
Legal Traps

• Live traps

*Hancock, Bailey, Ezee Set, & other live traps are legal to use for beaver, but live beaver cannot be relocated*
Other Trapping Regulations

- Mandatory licensing
  (for Commercial & Sport trappers)
- Restrictions on trap types and sizes*
- Mandatory daily trap checks*
- Written landowner permission*
- Mandatory trap identification tags with owner’s name & address*
- Mandatory reporting of all captures *

* Applies to trapping under depredation permits and NWCO work
Depredation Permits

§ 50-11-2570 – Issuance of special permit to capture destructive animal

- No permit required to control damaging furbearers or squirrels within 100 yards of property owner’s residence.
- A depredation permit is required outside of the 100-yard distance exemption.
- Animals caught must be destroyed or released on site.
- Required to shoot at night (with local DNR LE approval)
Questions?