

MORRIS COUNTY PARK COMMISSION
RESOLUTION NO. 66-21

WHEREAS, the Morris County Park Commission deems it appropriate and in the public interest to establish policies to guide the effective operation of its facilities and programs, **NOW THEREFORE**

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Morris County Park Commission on this 26th day of April 2021 that the appended policy titled, "Wildlife/Habitat Interaction" is presented in the form attached effective immediately on a prospective basis.


April 26, 2021

MORRIS COUNTY PARK COMMISSION



Stuart Lasser
President

<u>Commissioner</u>	<u>Mover</u>	<u>Seconder</u>	<u>Aye</u>	<u>Nay</u>	<u>Abstain</u>	<u>Absent</u>
Lasser			✓			
Seabury		✓	✓			
Baron						✓
Cass-Schmidt	✓		✓			
Cogger			✓			
Kalafer						✓
McCarthy			✓			
Tal						✓
Vacant						


_____, I, David D. Helmer, Executive Director of the Morris County Park Commission, do hereby certify that the above is a true and correct copy of a resolution adopted by the Morris County Park Commission at a meeting held on April 26, 2021, at the Park Commission offices, 300 Mendham Road, Morristown, New Jersey.

MORRIS COUNTY PARK COMMISSION

Policy and Procedure

Subject: Wildlife/Habitat Interaction	Effective Date: 1995	Approval:
	Revised Date: 03/24/14	Approval: Res. No. 44-14
	Revised Date: 04/26/21	Approval: Res. No 66-21
	Revised Date:	Approval:

Purpose:

To conserve, manage, and protect the park system’s diverse natural habitats and resources; and the fish and wildlife populations they sustain; for their ecological values and for the benefit and enjoyment of current and future generations; and to inform and educate the public about these resources to promote understanding, appreciation, and a stewardship ethic.

Goals and Objectives:

- A. Goal: The Park Commission will strive to protect native habitats and associated wildlife species with the interest of promoting maximum levels of biodiversity and viable ecosystems in the lands under its stewardship responsibility.

Objectives:

1. Protect, maintain, and enhance a mosaic of habitat types for wildlife.
2. Identify critical habitat and locations of existing populations of endangered and threatened wildlife species. Protect existing populations and restore degraded habitat where appropriate and feasible.
3. Rely on natural resources specialists to evaluate actions that have the potential to negatively disturb wildlife populations for adverse impacts. Identify the appropriate avoidance or mitigation strategies.
4. Protect areas that preserve the natural connectivity of habitats to maintain the genetic diversity of species.
5. Develop species-specific best management practices.
6. Initiate and support cooperative programs that are designed to protect, manage, or research habitats and/or wildlife populations.
7. Protect parklands from new invasions of non-native invasive wildlife species. Remove existing non-native invasive wildlife species as appropriate and feasible.

- B. Goal: The Park Commission recognizes that wildlife can cause conflicts such as damage to private and public property; damage to other wildlife and habitats; and negative human health impacts or injuries. The Park Commission will evaluate these situations to determine whether control measures are warranted.

Objectives:

1. Implement control measures for an individual animal or population of animals if any of the following conditions are documented:
 - a. An injured, diseased, rabid, or otherwise unpredictable animal presents an immediate threat to human safety or health.
 - b. A threat of physical injury or disease transmission to humans exists due to abnormal or excessively conditioned animal behavior, particularly in public use areas.
 - c. High quality natural areas, rare species, or other sensitive natural resources face high levels of impact from the behavior of an individual animal or population of animals.
 - d. Unacceptable damage is occurring to park infrastructure, cultural resources, gardens, golf courses, landscaping, public property, or private property.
 - e. An animal or population of animals has inhabited a structure or building.
 - f. A feral or escaped domestic animal has taken up residence on parkland.
2. Employ control measures that seek to minimize adverse impacts to the animal(s) in question if appropriate and economically feasible.
3. Adopt standard protocol to evaluate and treat the conflicts listed in section B1 and disseminate this information to Park Commission staff.
4. Develop programs to manage overabundant wildlife populations in situations where said populations pose chronic threats to the viability of park resources and habitats.
5. Base all wildlife control measures and management programs on:
 - a. All applicable laws and regulations
 - b. Park Commission natural resources conservation objectives
 - c. Approved park plans
 - d. The best available science and information
 - e. Accepted ecological principles
 - f. Proven wildlife management techniques
 - g. Appropriate animal welfare concerns
 - h. Site and situational limitations

6. Employ control measures and management programs that are biologically, socially, environmentally and economically sound, effective, and practical.
7. Apply an adaptive management approach that seeks to improve management strategies over time by learning from previous outcomes.
8. Initiate and support cooperative and regional programs that are designed to reduce, manage, or research overabundant wildlife populations.

C. Goal: The Park Commission will educate its staff, volunteers, and the public about wildlife related issues to foster understanding, appreciation, and to promote a stewardship ethic.

Objectives:

1. Develop programs that effectively disseminate science-based information about wildlife, their habitats, threats to their well-being, and conservation strategies.
2. Encourage the use of park property by students conducting academic research and school groups participating in instructor-led environmental labs and studies.
3. Encourage efforts that develop public understanding of and dialogue about wildlife management challenges faced by the Park Commission and the County.
4. Promote safe, ethical, and responsible behavior towards wildlife species through example and educational programs.
5. Encourage staff participation in management strategies and programs.
6. Develop communication and data collection procedures with Park Commission field staff.

Subject: Beaver Management Procedures for Wildlife/Habitat Interaction Policy	Effective Date: 04/26/21	Approval: Resolution No. 66-21
	Revised Date:	Approval
	Revised Date:	Approval:
	Revised Date:	Approval:

Purpose:

To provide guidelines and procedures for assessing and mitigating perceived and/or actual damage caused by *Castor canadensis* (North American beaver) on Morris County Park Commission properties. This policy serves to ensure a sustainable balance between the natural and beneficial presence of beavers and the importance of protecting natural resource assets and private and public property.

1. Background:

Beavers are a native species which were once nearly extirpated from the state but are now common throughout much of Morris County. Due to their habitat modification abilities including the damming of waterways, flooding of areas, and removal or killing of trees, they can alter natural and man-made areas and the surrounding ecosystem. Many waterbodies in Morris County provide suitable beaver habitat. In natural settings beaver activity can be beneficial in creating diverse habitats and populations are managed through predation, weather, and natural selection. In more developed areas, beaver activity can cause damage to both man-made and natural features where natural population controls are not as prevalent.

2. Identification and Assessment:

When reported by park staff, patrons, or private property owners, beaver activity will be assessed by Natural Resources staff. Assessments can be made throughout the year as needed though available solutions may be limited depending on the time of year. Assessments will determine whether beavers are present, if damage is recent, and the location of any dams and lodges. Impacts will be assessed at each location to determine if beaver activity is detrimental, considering nearby private property, park infrastructure, roads, trails, culverts, and the impact of dead trees in high-use areas. Impacts to natural resources will also be assessed, especially in areas with limited tree cover or where large, mature trees may be at risk. The safety risk for staff involved with the breaching and removal of dams will also be considered in assessments. Whenever possible, non-lethal solutions to beaver issues on park property will be pursued. Once

a beaver assessment has been performed, Natural Resources staff will recommend one of the following four management strategies:

Strategy 1: No Action

Beaver activity does not pose a current threat to infrastructure, trails, or sensitive natural resources nor is likely to pose a threat in the near future. The area affected by beaver activity may respond positively from a habitat perspective. No action is needed though the area will be monitored on a yearly basis.

Strategy 2: Non-Lethal Measures

Beaver activity poses a minor threat to infrastructure, trails, or sensitive natural resources and non-lethal measures may be employed as a temporary or permanent solution. Non-lethal measures may include removing or breaching dams, installing flow devices, and protecting existing trees with fencing. When possible, dam removal will not take place if beavers are known to be present between December 1 and March 15 to avoid impacts from water level changes on beavers and other wildlife. Non-lethal measures require regular monitoring and follow-up and may only be a temporary solution before having to utilize Strategies 3 or 4.

Strategy 3: Trapping Within Regular State Season

Beaver activity threatens infrastructure, trails, or sensitive natural resources and non-lethal measures alone cannot resolve the issue. Controlled trapping will be permitted during the NJ Division of Fish and Wildlife's annual beaver trapping season which typically runs from late December to early February. During this season, trappers with a zone-specific permit may harvest beavers following State trapping regulations. Trappers will be permitted to utilize their catch within State regulations. If finding a legal trapper is difficult, the NJDFW can assist by providing a site-specific permit to help find a trapper and allow an increased tag allocation.

Strategy 4: Emergency Trapping under a Special Wildlife Management Permit Beaver activity poses a critical threat to infrastructure, trails, or sensitive natural resources and trapping is required immediately. This recommendation would only be pursued if non-lethal measures are ineffective and the delay of trapping until the regular State season may cause further unacceptable damage. In this case staff will immediately contact the U.S. Department of Agriculture Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service Wildlife Services, who can assess and make a recommendation for action. The NJ Division of Fish and Wildlife will review and can issue a Special Wildlife Management Permit. Natural Resources staff will find a licensed and experienced trapper with the help of the NJDFW if needed. As per the regulations of the permit, all beavers caught must be disposed of.

3. Coordination with Trappers

When employing Strategies 3 and 4, Natural Resources staff will coordinate with the NJ Division of Fish and Wildlife to identify a licensed trapper.

Trappers must provide staff with their name, contact information, conservation identification number, vehicle make/model, license plate number and a signed liability waiver. The primary trapper may identify assistants who will be required to provide the same information. All trapping activities will be coordinated with Park Police and necessary site-specific staff.

Trappers will be provided with an authorization letter specifying the area in need of trapping and any special considerations. A parking placard and gate keys to access park areas will be provided if necessary. Natural Resources staff may require an on-site pre-trapping meeting to review the area. Trappers will be encouraged to limit activities to off-peak hours and to be as discreet as possible. Trappers will be permitted to use all legal trapping methods except when Natural Resources staff deem certain methods unacceptable due to particular site considerations.

Trapping under this policy will be limited to beavers only. Trappers must keep Natural Resources staff informed of any harvests and issues. Upon conclusion of the trapping program, trappers must remove all gear from the park, return any keys issued, and give a final harvest count to Natural Resources staff.

4. Monitoring

Areas identified as having recent beaver activity will be assessed by Natural Resources staff on a yearly basis to determine the need for further actions. All areas will be assessed before November 15, and any recommendations for trapping will be approved by the Park Commission. The Park Commission will continue to explore and implement non-lethal measures where appropriate and feasible.