

Assessment Interview Summary Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife Beaver Management Work Group

Overview

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife Commission (ODFWC) is initiating the Beaver Management Work Group to address outstanding issues relating to beaver management. Kearns & West provides neutral process guidance and has been hired by ODFW to help facilitate and support the work group with the goal of creating a constructive and ongoing dialogue.

To assist in early planning for the Beaver Management Work Group, Kearns & West interviewed 21 members – community and interest group representatives appointed by the ODFW Commission, lead staff and lead commissioners for each group. The purpose of the interviews was to learn about the Work Group member’s background and interests, better understand the member’s hopes and expectations for the process, highlight important issues to address, and hear suggestions for how to have a productive and constructive process.

This Assessment Summary outlines who participated, the questions asked, key themes from the interviews including work group member goals and expectations for the process, data needs and resources, key issues to address, challenges to be aware of, and suggestions for a successful and collaborative process.

List of Interviewees

Name	Group
Leland Brown	Oregon Chapter of The Wildlife Society
Lauren Smith	Association of Oregon Counties
Jefferson Jacobs	Oregon Natural Desert Association
Samantha Bruegger	WildEarth Guardians
Danielle Moser	Oregon Wild
Brian Posewitz <i>Alternate: Scott Beckstead</i>	Humane Voters Oregon <i>Center for a Humane Economy</i>
Ernie Niemi	Natural Resource Economics
Darren Bollen	Bureau of Land Management
Josh Chapman	US Forest Service
Wayne Elmore	Full Stream Consulting/retired BLM
Boone Kauffman	Illahee Sciences International/Oregon State University
Chris Jordan	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Fisheries

Name	Group
Amy Patrick <i>Alternate: Tyler Dungannon</i>	Oregon Hunters Association
Mary Anne Cooper	Oregon Farm Bureau
Stan Steele	Oregon Trappers Association
Becky Hatfield-Hyde	ODFW Commission
Greg Wolley	ODFW Commission
Derek Broman	ODFW Wildlife Biologist
Tom Stahl	ODFW Fish Biologist
Kevin Blakely	ODFW Deputy Administrator

Q1: Share with us a little about your background, involvement, and interests related to beavers or trap checking.

The interviewees’ backgrounds related to beaver management covered a broad spectrum of experience and expertise including:

- Lived in Oregon for multiple generations as well as experience from other states.
- Multiple years of conservation experience including developing and directing policy or program management.
- The years of experience working on beaver issues range from one year to over 30 years.
- Have participated on previous work groups and/or committees for years including involvement with the previous Beaver Work Group, now known as the Beaver Coordination Forum, and Umpqua Basin Beaver Work group, Southern Oregon Beaver Working Group, and others.
- Legislation relating to wildlife management.
- Experience working in natural resources, public policy, wildlife biology, conservation programming, economics, environmental law, and ecology. Some have published research in these areas, and some are professors.
- Experience working on wildlife issues across county, state, regional, and federal geographies.
- Advocacy and petition work on issues relating to beaver trapping, bait hunting of bears, dog hunting of bears/cougars, and banning marten trapping.
- Experience working on environmental policies.
- Experience working as a wildlife trooper.
- Considerable experience trapping and hunting.
- Experience working on cougar work groups, wolf management plan, sage grouse, and trap check work groups.

Q2: Complete this sentence: At the end of this process, I hope that _____.

Interviewees completed the sentence above as follows:

- We will use and understand the science to inform evidence-based decision making.
- ODFWC will change their policies and guidelines for how they currently manage beavers and conduct rulemaking around beaver restoration.
- ODFWC acts on recommendations from work group.
- We address beaver management within ODFWC authority.
- There is consistency in classification of beaver across the state agencies and that beavers are not classified as a predator.
- Beaver can be recognized as a keystone species.
- We have a process where everyone feels heard and respected.
- We create solutions that will benefit beavers and associated species.
- We will listen to and acknowledges people's concerns and ideas.
- We can develop policy options that are more than across the board bans.
- We can develop better rules and policies to sustainably manage beavers for environmental benefit, biodiversity, and to help address climate change.
- We can develop new policies to better protect beavers.
- There is better coordination and understanding across agencies who have a role in managing beaver.
- The state can improve how we manage beaver for watershed ecology and health.
- Develop a better understanding and data about the impact to beavers when classified as predator.
- We can identify where beavers support critical habitat and where beavers are most needed.
- We can work together to design incentive programs for reporting and helping beavers to persist on the landscape.
- We can develop new mitigation tools and work together with landowners.

Q3: What are the key questions to answer and important issues to address in the Beaver Work Group/Trap Check Work Group and why?

Interviewees suggested the following questions and issues to address.

Management

- How are beaver managed now? Who has what authority? What needs to change about how beavers are managed?
- Include discussion on habitat and how federal land managers can work to improve beaver habitat, as well as clarifying the roles of the federal land management agency (habitat management) vs. the state (population monitoring and harvest management) vs. federal trapping (USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS)).
- What are the costs and benefits of the state managing a furbearer program?
- Do we *need to* manage the impacts of beaver on the landscape?
- How can we create a healthier beaver population?
- How do we restore beaver into unoccupied habitat?
- What are the co-existence tools for beaver management? Are non-lethal options used enough?
- What incentives are there for landowners to keep beavers on the landscape?
- How can we work with beavers to manage landscapes?
- We need to know how to relocate beaver successfully.
- What are side boards for salmon recovery and how do they influence beaver management?
- We need to rethink predatory classification – what is the history?
- Beaver management is siloed across state agencies due to their classification and the mission of the agency – we need a more comprehensive management approach – include Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA), Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF), Department of State Lands (DSL), Oregon Water Resources Department (OWRD) and Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB) in the discussion.
- How are other states managing beaver? What can we learn from them?

Data Gathering and Gaps

- Do we know enough about the current beaver population to know if/where we need to improve or maintain the beaver population?
- What are all the factors that impact beaver population? Do we have the data on predation, trapping, disease, etc.?
- What are impacts of translocation on beaver disease?
- What does optimal beaver habitat look like in Oregon? What are the actual habitat requirements, and the amount and location of suitable beaver habitat in the state? Need to map suitable beaver habitat.
- Do we really understand the habitat requirements of beavers? Slope, stream width, abiotic factors, etc.?
- Why do some beavers build dams and others burrow into banks?

- Do beavers cause harm to fish?
- What are the parameters for beaver to be transient or more durable residents? Why do some beavers move?
- Is the habitat available today different from historic habitat?
- What are we losing by having low beaver numbers?
- What are the human impacts on beaver populations (roads, development, encroachment, ag/forestry)?
- Because of the classification (predator) we do not have good data collection systems in place; we do not have enough consistent information about beaver populations and locations.
- What are ideas for collecting data from private landowners that are not burdensome?
- Work with Oregon State Police (OSP) to gather data.
- Look for opportunities to gather information at the time of a take such as size (age), date, time of day, location.
- Use the stream codes to record beaver information. Have a beaver record card like bob cats and river otter – use salmonid stream code. The card records the date, location, sex, length.
- We need to engage with additional researchers: Jimmy Taylor and Vanessa Petro Duane Jackson, Jason Dunham, John Stevenson

Impact on Landscape/Environment

- How do beaver's features on the landscape benefit/impact the landscape?
- How do we get more dams in the areas where they are beneficial? What are the conditions needed for dam building?
- How do beavers impact landowners: forestry, drainage, roads, cattle grazing, etc.?
- What are the limiting factors to beaver ponds on the landscape?
- What other species are benefiting from beaver presence and beaver dams?
- Is there a way to protect beavers located in critical habitat for endangered species?

Trapping

- How does trapping impact beaver population dynamics? Is trapping density dependent?
- Is beaver trapping a key limitation to beavers building dams?
- When could periodic trapping closures be helpful?
- Is the beaver trapping ban a science question or social question?
- How do we reduce suffering?
- How have trapping bans in other places affected beaver populations and habits? What are the consequences of a trapping ban?

- How many trappers are out there?
- How many beavers are being trapped?
- How do trapped areas compare to non-trapping areas? What are the effects on the landscape?

Q4: What are the challenges and barriers to addressing the identified issues and concerns? How might they be overcome?

Interviewees shared the following challenges and ideas:

Challenges:

Public opinion:

- Beavers have impacts on land that harm landowners, counties, agricultural producers, timber, etc.
- Landowners need to have multiple management tools.
- The public is not knowledgeable about the role of trapping in wildlife management.
- The dominant culture is opposed to animal products: fur, leather, meat, etc.
- Small number of Oregonians want trapping, and the majority does not want it.

Translocation

- Translocating beaver is difficult and not often successful.
- Should not be allowed to trap after a relocation, in areas where we are actively relocating beaver

Current societal trends:

- Virtual meetings are hard for building relationships.
- Trappers/hunters see any change as a threat to culture and identity.
- Political tribalism is a big challenge.
- People have different values about fish and wildlife.
- People have ecological amnesia and do not remember what healthy streams look like.
- No one wants to give up something.
- North American model of conservation is outdated.
- Beaver management is more contentious in Oregon than in other western states, why is this?

ODFW Agency and Commissioners

- This is an ODFWC work group – how do we stay within the scope of authority of ODFW?
- We need the other state agencies involved for a true comprehensive approach.
- Bureaucracy is a barrier to coordination.

- Coordination with all agencies responsible for beaver management across agencies and roles is not happening.
- Other entities (OWEB, private forest accord, etc.) are currently discussing beaver management, but not coordinating with ODFW.
- There is distrust of ODFW beaver science.
- Perceived bias of ODFW because the revenue stream from licenses supports ODFW budget.
- ODFW has a challenge with changing culture and added cost of changing their program.
- Lack of capacity at ODFW and federal agencies to support monitoring and data gathering.
- Delay in beginning the work groups lead to suspicions on all sides that process is biased towards an outcome.
- There is a perception that ODFW is biased against trappers.
- Unclear purpose/scope of this group – we cannot address everything related to beavers.

Environmental/biological Conditions

- East and West sides of Oregon are treated the same, but they have different beaver habit and population. There are many beavers in Western Oregon.
- Oregon’s forests are overly mature because land managers are focused on saving fish. These landscapes do not support beaver as much anymore.
- Loss of beavers mean a loss of water-cooling function.

Information

- Predatory classification does not require people to report the take – no public information.
- There are costs to adding additional reporting.
- Reporting by county does not give information on what streams have beavers. Need better data.
- We are not relying on the same science.
- Science is out there but not all see as valid.
- People arguing based on emotions are not receptive to science/facts.
- Concerned about gathering more data and having it used against the trappers, hunters, landowners.

Opportunities:

- The Oregon Way is working collaboratively with people for common outcomes for the environment.
- Water quality and quantity is central to everyone’s interests. There is common ground there.
- There are existing relationships among the work group members – history of finding common ground. The work groups are an opportunity to strengthen and develop new relationships.

- People know beavers are keystone species.
- People have generally positive feelings about beavers and want to help them.
- ODFW has great respect for and experience with wildlife.
- ODFW could (has mandate and authority) to manage natural stream processes that benefit all species. We need to explore this more.
- There is support for broadening funding base for ODFW.
- There is an opportunity for us to work together and identify legislation and increased funding for beaver management across state agencies.
- Nothing wrong with periodic closures of trapping. Monitor outcomes; tie to salmon recovery.
- Build relationship to work on this together – tired of petitions.
- Landowners would like to find more incentive-based options to address beaver issues and habitat.
- Trappers and hunters can be more involved in gathering data.
- BLM resource management plan for the Cascades/NW OR district includes beaver as management tool – potential for more collaborative work here.

Q5: What are the information, data gaps, and resources the groups should consider?

Interviewees offered the following suggestions for research to conduct and research to consult:

- Need to understand habitat requirements from the beaver’s perspective.
- Understand why beavers are dwindling in cascades and why they are not returning to historic habitat?
- What effect has the recent fires had on beaver populations and what effect historically has fire had on beaver populations?
- What role can beavers play to prevent fire?
- We have an opportunity to set up some good research studies – beaver population, health of population, trapping questions – as they relate to Oregon. Differentiate west side and east side.
- Clearly map and describe what suitable beaver habitat is and is not to help inform the use of beaver as a salmonid recovery tool. Need to understand where and how much suitable habitat we currently have. Need to understand historical changes to suitable habitat and how much “unoccupied” beaver habit exists and why.
- There is a general lack of understanding of beaver populations across the state. Fisheries biologists and wildlife biologists view beavers through different lenses. Restoration is highlighted by fish biologists because of salmonid recovery without understanding key biological needs of the beavers,

for example, the size and steepness of rivers and streams and the support for transient versus resident beavers.

- Need to better understand the habitat parameters to support beavers on the landscape and how well/not well they match with Coho habitat. High quality beaver habitat is the valley bottom – much of which is private land. Work with National Marine Fisheries, landowners, US Fish and Wildlife Service.
- Work with APHIS Wildlife Services to gather data and identify opportunities for research, pilot projects.
- There does not seem to be a definitive resource for comprehensive information about beavers. There is distrust of ODFW because their management of beavers is through a narrow filter. There is evidence that beavers can be a valuable resource, but not good data about the durability of the benefits. Beavers do not necessarily build dams where we want them, and they do not necessarily stay in areas where we want them to stay.
- Research about the impacts of forest practices on beaver habitat. Work with USDA Forest Service and ODF regarding forestry practices and beaver habitat.
- Understand the role of trapping and the public costs associated with supporting a recreational trapping program.
- Understand the impacts of stream channelization on beaver population and habits.
- We have anecdotal information about “trapping beavers out of streams,” but do we understand the ecological effects on those watersheds because of those actions?
- The “furbearer” term is based on an outdated paradigm. We need to develop a new category for beaver and the role they play to help agencies manage differently.
- Make the science of what beavers need to thrive and how they can be beneficial more widely available.
- Research to define “non-use” values for beaver. How to build this in to ODFW’s management strategies? There is a solid foundation of best available science, public cost/benefits associated with more beavers on the landscape.
- Beavers are not threatened or endangered, so we have a lot of data gaps. Agencies are not required to gather data or develop species specific plans. How can we better connect beavers to threatened and endangered species? Is there a new classification that helps us with additional resources, data collection and monitoring?

Researchers Involved in Beaver Work

- Jimmy Taylor and Vanessa Petro from OSU. They have been studying transplanting beaver into the Oregon coast range when caught on landowner property. Important to better understand impact and opportunities associated with relocation.
- Chris Jordan – focuses on the pond side of beaver research.
- Duane Jackson, Umpqua river watershed – heads up OR wildlife research group.

- Jason Dunham, focusing on specific questions that might guide/change beaver management and the research that needs to be done.
- John Stevenson, beaver researcher whose work will be published soon.

Q6: What ideas and suggestions do you have for how we work together in an effective, productive, and successful collaborative process? (Including topics such as: operating protocols, frequency and length of meetings, materials development and review timeframes, public comment, media).

Interviewees Offered the Following Process Suggestions:

Schedule

- Shorter more frequent meetings: once a week or once every other week for 1-2 hours.
- Get started soon – some of us have been waiting for this work group to start for five years or more.
- Summer months are challenging with vacations, seasonal work, and the fire season at the end of summer.
- Make meetings accessible, fair, and non-burdensome, and accommodate busy schedules.
- Meetings need to be long enough so that people can speak and start to build trust.
- Meet more than once a month – build momentum and rapport.

Format

- Understand the need for virtual meetings at first but would like to get to in-person meetings soon.
- Field based meetings are a strong preference.
- Ideas for field visit – Oregon Zoo; private landowner, state park, county properties.
- Have in-person meetings; people are more talkative, and it is better for building relationships.
- Have between meeting homework.
- Keep this group going.
- Keep this process meaningful.

Decision Making

- There should be a clear outcome for work groups.
- Include how to address conflict when it arises.
- Aim for consensus recommendations.

Ground rules/principles

- Mutual respect.

- Listen to understand.
- Come to meetings consistently and be prepared.
- Everyone must be responsible for this process.
- Respect each other's values.
- Make efforts to understand each other.
- Be willing to change.
- Do not go to the media before discussing with the group.
- Look to forest collaboratives protocols as a model.

Process Ideas

- Have group determine the positives/negatives of having more beaver and share the costs.
- Utilize spatial/visual communications tools.
- Bring in external scientists.
- Align around science.
- Allow space for discussions involving ODFW as well as coordination with other agencies.
- Use a phased approach for working together.
- Focus on one topic at a time.
- Have a charter with clear roles and responsibilities outlined.
- Need a clear mandate and schedule from the ODFWC on rulemaking and what outcomes they expect.
- Identify topics in advance for next meeting(s).
- Develop a shared values or purpose statement – something we can all agree on.
- Well-defined topics.

Public Comment

- Public comment should happen through commission meetings and updates to commission.
- Public comment can derail focus of work groups and takes time in meetings.
- Suggestion to reserve 5-10 minutes for public comments to allow work groups to be responsive to public interests/needs.
- Consider World Café format for public comment.

Q7: What are some of the lessons learned from previous efforts?

Interviewees offered the following reflections on lessons learned from previous efforts:

- There are bills introduced every legislative session to address issues related to beavers. We need to come together to resolve these issues.
- Trappers/hunters pay for conservation, continue to come the table, and have done a lot to build in best practices. Would like to be seen as partners in how to address issues.
- The recent marten trapping ban includes many of the same players as this work group – some people are frustrated with the outcome of that effort.
- Would like to work together for better outcomes. Concerned that some folks at the table will not participate in good faith and come into the process with the intent to pursue legal or legislative action influence wildlife management.
- Learn from the small local beaver work groups – they are doing work on the ground and are very effective. Umpqua area provides a good example.
- We need ODFW to bring their biological expertise into the process.
- Would like to have ODFW separate from the facilitation role.
- We need to do something differently, the status quo is not working.
- Confusion about who has authority for beaver removal and beaver management.
- How is this effort related to or impact the Beaver Forum?

Process Lessons Learned

- Need a good/unbiased facilitator.
- Have clear notes and meeting summaries.
- Outline clear decision processes.
- Set expectations for roles of the commissioners and the work groups.
- Assign homework between meetings.
- People need to come prepared and do their homework.
- Consensus support is only way to sustain decisions.
- Set time frames for meetings.
- Keep this group small.
- This cannot be a space for forum shopping.
- Communication has not been consistent and clear about what we are going to do.
- We need to balance science that is shared.
- Expectations have been created.

Q8: Do we have the right work group members to address the issues outlined above? Are key groups overrepresented or missing? Check your correct contact information and the information about your organization.

Reflections and Suggestions on the Work Group Composition

- East side irrigator/ irrigation district
- Beaver biologist
- Tribal representation
- Oregon Department of Agriculture
- APHIS Wildlife Services
- Legislative staffer
- Army Corps of Engineers/Reclamations for water diversion
- State of the Beaver: Stan Petrowski, Leonard Houston
- Public trust/social justice perspective is missing
- Watershed councils
- Forestry sector: Oregon Department of Forestry, US Forest Service, private forest lands
- US Fish and Wildlife Service: Chris Allen or Bryan Bangs
- National Marine Fisheries Service - Coho manager
- Academics/research community

Q9: What questions do you have for us?

- How many meetings do we anticipate? How often will we report to the ODFWC? Would like to have ODFW staff as participants in the process. There is a range of scientific information to consider.
- Be clear on the charge of the group – this is a big topic, what can we be successful in addressing?
- Would like to see this Work Group as helping to resolve issues for the commission.
- Important to provide the commission with solid science – how will we do that?
- Is the commission looking to us to provide direction? Options? A path forward? All of the above?
- Is one possible path forward rulemaking? Could one option be an agreement for the parties to come together around joint legislation?
- Would like to pursue support of a policy option package for additional funding for staff- more capacity to help resolve issues.
- What is the deadline for our recommendations?

- The outcomes will depend on how the conversation goes. It would be great to have champions come out of the process and have the commission act. Anticipate multiple levels of outcomes.
- What does success look like to you?