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Busy beaver: Building a cost-sharing program

The North American beaver is a keystone species which creates and enhances aquatic and riparian habitats. Once widely abundant, they were trapped almost to extinction by the late 1800s and remain at reduced numbers in many areas. Increasing the number of beaver in North America would dramatically improve wildlife habitat, water quantity and quality, and climate change resiliency. Here, we discuss the creation and operation of beaver incentive programs in Colorado and Montana, aimed at fostering stakeholder support for beaver and increasing the overall number of beaver on the landscape. The broader goal of these programs is to use beaver as a restoration tool to increase the quantity and quality of aquatic and riparian habitat, which in turn will support a large number of at-risk species in the region. Key approaches which are contributing to the early success of this program include stakeholder engagement (through investment of money and labor), agency support, and use of bottom-up peer-to-peer messaging for growth and promotion.