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History of Beavers in Europe

Beaver populations in Eurasia are in rapid recovery both in numbers and range, with populations now re-established in all of the countries of their former range except for Portugal, the southern Balkans, Turkey, and the Middle East. The pace of change has never been faster than over the last 10 years. Populations are increasing especially rapidly in the low relief, densely populated countries of NW Europe. There, they are reaching the rapid increase phase of population growth on many watersheds. This is the period in which damming and other beaver engineering becomes common. In this presentation the history of beavers in Europe is reviewed, and the likely course of range and population expansion over the next 20 years outlined. North America experienced this phase of expansion several decades earlier than Europe, and the lessons learned – or not learned – are discussed. It remains to be seen whether the heavily developed regions of Europe now experiencing rapid recolonization by beavers will learn from N. American experience, or have to make their own mistakes.