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### **Beavers, Salmon, and the Beaver State**

The objectives of this presentation are to explain how:

1. changes in beaver management in the Oregon could lead to the first recovery and delisting of a protected salmonid species and
2. changing beaver policy in “the Beaver State” is necessary but won’t be easy.

Of the 29 salmonid populations listed under the Endangered Species Act, Oregon Coast coho salmon may be closest to recovery. This species has only one primary limiting factor - reduced quantity and quality of rearing habitat for juvenile salmon.

Both the state and federal recovery plans focus on the need for more high quality summer and winter rearing habitat and the federal recovery plan specifically calls for “Strategies to Improve Habitat ... (to) Ensure long-term ecosystem functions and high quality habitat by ... encouraging formation of beaver dams and beaver dam analogues.”

As the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife’s website says: “The beaver has been so significant in Oregon’s history that it is our state symbol, the mascot for Oregon State University, and holds honor on ... Oregon’s state flag.”

Unfortunately, beaver management is a challenging political problem for Oregon. Conservation, wildlife, landowner/manager and trapping interests are at odds about how to manage beavers. A state law, ORS 610.002, states in part: “ ‘predatory animal’ . . . includes . . . rodents . . .” Because beavers are rodents, this law allows landowners to kill beavers and throw them away without making a report.



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While there is no way to tell how many beavers are being killed in Oregon, there is some evidence that the number may be high in some places. One example is the landowner who proudly announced that he had killed more than 90 on his property in one year. Another is the timber company employee who commented on the five tall piles of beaver bones on his company's property: "That's how we manage beavers on private industrial forestland."

The result is that there isn't an effective way to protect beavers, even when they provide a low-cost, effective way to restore critical habitat for salmon and other protected species.

My experience suggests that Oregon's Legislature and agencies have not been able to deal with this politically charged issue, but I am working with other to initiate a collaborative effort that could lead to the protection of private property while protecting beavers so they can improve salmon and bird habitat quality and restore groundwater.

Here are a few of the steps that Oregon should take:

- Develop a beaver management plan, as Utah has.
- Develop an effective network of people trained in non-lethal strategies, following the examples of Massachusetts-based Beaver Solutions LLC and Seattle-based Beavers Northwest.
- Implement a statewide public relations and education effort to provide information about the benefits provided by Oregon's state animal and how to responsibly address conflicts.