

An Important Message to Users of Conservation Lands



The Sudbury Conservation Commission has recently become aware of several areas in town where well-meaning residents have removed beaver dams, thinking they were improving the ecological conditions on the property. Please be advised that under state law (M.G.L. Chapter 131 s. 30A) it is illegal to remove a beaver dam in most instances.

One example is in the Hop Brook Marsh conservation land. The debris piled up at the outflow to the duck pond is actually material placed there by a colony of beavers living in the pond. This is their dam. The beaver lodge is a bank lodge and can be seen on the opposite side of the pond located between the large bridge and the plank bridge. They can often be observed from the bridge in the early evening. Beavers dam the pond to raise the water level, allowing entrance and exit to the lodge from underwater where they feel safer.

This time of year it is very likely that there are young beaver (kits) in the lodge. Lowering the water level may result in the death of these kits if the parents do not feel safe using an above-water access that leaves them vulnerable when they gather food.

In addition to the beavers, other wildlife benefits by the raised water level. In the past, ducks and geese have nested on the small "islands", or tufts of vegetation in the pond. Lowering the water level can provide for easy access to the nest by predators such as fox, raccoons, fisher, and coyotes. These animals do not mind getting their feet wet to predate a nest, but they will not swim. Keeping the water level up is critical to the survival of the nest.

Maintaining a higher water level also increases the amount of dissolved oxygen in the water. This benefits turtles and fish who need oxygenated water for survival as well. In past years when the flashboards at the pond outlet were removed we had massive turtle kills over the winter.

The Conservation Commission understands that having some of trails around the flooded may be an inconvenience to some of our valued trail users. However, the Commission strives to balance the needs of wildlife with the desires of humans. We believe that humans are drawn to our conservation lands in large part as a result of the wildlife, not in spite of it. We will continue to allow the beavers to dam the pond outlet as long as there are alternatives for trail access around the pond. The alternative trail takes visitors over the bridge at the pond inlet and connects with the trail around the outlet. We are considering installing a "beaver deceiver", otherwise known as a water control device at the pond

outlet. If this is done, it will be sized correctly and placed at the proper elevation to maintain a balance of wildlife needs and trail uses.

We ask that you put up with the inconvenience of flooded trails and take the longer route around the pond. Please respect the fact that the dam is not harmful but beneficial to wildlife.

Below is a link to more information that might be of interest.

<http://www.mass.gov/eea/docs/dfg/dfw/wildlife/wildlife-facts-pubs/beavers-in-mass.pdf>

Please don't hesitate to contact the Commission at 978-440-5471 if you wish to discuss this further.