

Commentary

Comment on Siemer et al. (2013)

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AS A PSYCHOLOGIST with special concern for public attitudes toward beaver (*Castor canadensis*) management, I read with interest the Siemer, Jonker, Becker, and Organ article appearing in your spring issue (Siemer et al. 2013). I was surprised to see that the article was based on data >10 years old and that the report did not even mention the Needham and Morzillo (2011) survey from Oregon that looked at such parallel issues with contrasting results. I was especially disheartened to see that the study did not address in any way the successful use of flow devices that has made such a huge impact on public opinion of beaver problems. Certainly, as more stakeholders realize that there are options beyond the dichotomy of tolerance and trapping, opinions will continue to evolve.

The Siemer article appeared to assume that negative attitudes toward beavers were accurate and that positive attitudes were based on unfamiliarity with the issue. It did not consider the growing population of people who have had the benefit of seeing beaver problems solved humanely and how this affects their expectations for the next beaver situation they face. Since the survey was issued just 5 years after the new trapping restrictions were in place, questions are raised about its accuracy. Respondents were complaining about a burgeoning population at a time when research on reproductive and dispersal rates of beavers would say that very little difference could have been yet observed. The authors did not appear to differentiate between fear of beaver conflicts and actual beaver conflicts. The fact that they chose not to adjust the data to account for nonrespondent bias means that their study was disproportionately impacted by subjects who were upset about the beaver population and the outcome of the trapping legislation

My own low-lying city is a perfect example of how public opinion toward beavers could harden as problems arise and remarkably soften as solutions were implemented. The original

response to the threat of beaver flooding by Martinez, California, was trapping, but public opinion forced the use of a successful flow device instead. Six years later, with no flooding, better wildlife, and a yearly beaver festival to teach about beaver solutions and benefits, I would argue still that the folks who were the most afraid of beaver problems remain impervious to data and heartily anti-beaver. Public opinion is not the same thing as public information.

Massachusetts truly has a remarkable opportunity to learn about the relationship between humans and wildlife, but this cannot happen if the term "beaver management" continues to be synonymous with the term "beaver trapping". Six years ago my city made the commitment to co-exist with beavers, and currently our beaver population after 18 live births remains at seven. Because of our beaver-tended wetlands, we regularly see otter, heron, wood duck, steelhead, and even mink in our tiny urban stream. As the nation faces greater drought events, we should be more interested than ever in these important "water-savers" and the biodiversity their habitat creates.

Literature cited

- Needham, M. D., and A. T. Morzillo. 2011. *Land-owner incentives and tolerances for managing beaver impacts in Oregon*. Final project report for Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife and Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board. Oregon State University, Department of Forest Ecosystems and Society, Corvallis, Oregon, USA.
- Siemer, W. F., S. A. Jonker, D. J. Decker, and J. F. Organ. 2013. Toward an understanding of beaver management as human and beaver densities increase. *Human–Wildlife Interactions* 7:114–131.

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