

Beavers busy damming Cumberland Land Trust property



Cumberland Land Trust director Frank Matta points out the beavers' handiwork on the Great White Cedar Swamp trail off Nate Whipple Highway. Underbrush has been removed and used by the beavers as material to block a stone culvert thought to be about 200 years old in the front left. Meanwhile, the water level has been raised about 12 inches, Matta says. (Valley Breeze photos by Marcia Green)

By [MARCIA GREEN](#) Valley Breeze Editor

CUMBERLAND - It was just about a year ago when members of the Cumberland Land Trust figured out that flooding on their Atlantic White Cedar Swamp trail wasn't caused by heavy rains.

This trail off Nate Whipple Highway utilizes a colonial-era cart path along the side of the swamp that crosses a stone culvert thought to have been installed 200-plus years ago.

At first trust members poking around the flood waters last summer simply cleaned out the culvert crammed with mud and twigs.

"Then we came back the same afternoon and it was all plugged up again," says member Frank Matta. "We thought at first it had been vandalized."

It was about then that someone suggested beavers. "It hadn't dawned on us until that moment," Matta said this week.

But why would it? Beavers had been trapped to extinction back in the early 1700s and except for the family that turned up at Sylvie's Brook in Diamond Hill Park a year earlier, they were unheard of in Cumberland.

Very quickly trust members learned that the flooded trail was only the beginning of issues here.

Matta is estimating a resulting 12-inch rise to the water level over 40 acres of swamp here, so much that it has encroached on a neighbor's back yard, forcing the trust to abandon plans to simply build a footbridge and instead bring in a beaver expert from western Massachusetts with a plan for piping the beaver dam.

Moreover, they're now dealing with wetlands regulations of the state Department of Environmental Management as they develop a new trail on low lands to the east.

Meanwhile, the group has posted a sign explaining the flooding and has relocated access to the swamp to 60 Pound Road near Windsong Road.

Work is all in the early stages, leaving humans the task of frequently clearing away the beavers' industrious clogging of that culvert.

Walk in from the Nate Whipple side - with boots - to see mounds of mud and debris that were pulled out of the culvert but never reused by the critters.

There are telltale gnawed tree limbs strewn about, too.

Heavy brush that used to extend 20 to 30 feet into the swamp has been cleared out by the animals who used it all up as building and clogging material.

The land trust has a lot at stake here. It owns 154 acres of adjoining land between Nate Whipple and Pound Road acquired in three steps: The 39-acre swamp in 2002; the 30-acre James Bland Preserve in 2005; and the 84-acre Burlingame Preserve in 2008.

An elevated seat built as an Eagle Scout project just off Nate Whipple Highway offers a relaxing perch overlooking the swamp that is one of the few of its kind on the East Coast.

A year after their first appearance, says Matta, beavers are building lodges and altering water levels up and down the feeder streams to the Pawtucket and Cumberland reservoir system.

East Sneece Pond Brook connects the town's Sneece Pond Reservoir to the swamp then flows east to Pawtucket's southern reservoir in Arnold Mills. Ash Swamp Brook from the north, and Long Brook from the south also flow into the reservoir. They are all providing numerous housing options for beavers as they reproduce and branch out, Matta notes.

Further north is Miscoe Lake that links to Sylvie's Brook, while the Abbott Run flows from the Pawtucket reservoirs.

Matta says land trust members briefly considered eliminating the beavers.

That was the town officials' first reaction, too, when they showed up two years ago in Sylvie's Brook at Diamond Hill Park.

But pretty quickly, Matta says, the trust realized - just as town officials did - their role is to live with the natural environment, no matter how inconvenient.

Members met with local landscape architect George Gifford to begin mapping a new trail and several DEM employees to discuss permitting issues.

The group has also called in Michael Callahan of Beaver Solutions in South Hampton, Mass. He's proposing a piping system that will allow drainage through a hole in the dam. The company claims to have resolved more than 1,000 beaver problems in the United States since 1998 by installing flow devices that keep water draining without alerting the beavers. The Cumberland Land Trust is looking at spending about \$1,700 for the installation plus a yearly maintenance fee.

Charles Brown of DEM's wildlife division has also met with the Cumberland Land Trust, but says the wetlands division will be most involved moving forward.

Brown noted what most in Cumberland now realize - beavers can't legally be relocated. They can be trapped and killed by a licensed trapper during the late fall-early winter season. In cases of hardship, a licensed trapper can be engaged with a special permit.

Brown said beavers entered southwestern Rhode Island in the early 1970s after Connecticut began re-introducing them. Since then they've been slowly moving north, with the Cumberland-Lincoln area the last area of the state to encounter them.



Above is a pile of debris left behind by beavers clearing out their new "home" on the property.



Often flooded, but passable for those who don't mind a little mud, is this popular Land Trust trail off Nate Whipple Highway.



Initially, Cumberland Land Trust members blamed heavy rains and then assumed they had a simple blockage problem before realizing beavers were the cause of the flooded trail here at the western end of Nate Whipple Highway. Hikers have since been redirected to a new trailhead on Pound Road.

Comments

[critters](#)

[Permalink](#) Submitted by chief on Thu, 2015-08-06 10:22

I have a solution for both issues with pesky critters in in articles in this weeks Breeze. A GAME DINNER.

[Beavers do what Beavers do,](#)

[Permalink](#) Submitted by Camera1 on Thu, 2015-08-06 16:22

Beavers do what Beavers do, they build frigin dams. Why is it that every time animals in nature do what they are naturally intended to do we think the answer to the problem is to kill them if we humans don't like it. Leave the Beaver alone, it's their land too.