

SCOUT

NEWS AND VIEWS IN THE TEXAS OUTDOORS

BEAVERS ON THE MOVE

After last year's floods, beavers found new housing options.



As the near-record rains of the summer of 2007 continued delivering their onslaught, La Grange resident Pat Rebecsek was thankful he had beavers on his property. While his neighbors were having major trouble with flooding, the impact on his land from the continuous downpour was minimal. "Because of the beavers' dam, a tank had been created that gave all that extra water a place to go," says Rebecsek.

After one of the wettest summers on record, Texas landowners who've never before had resident beavers may find themselves joining Rebecsek's ranks. While most wildlife biologists believe that the increase in precipitation won't result in an overall rise in the beaver population, residency patterns are expected to differ dramatically from past years. Areas that have traditionally been without water (such as dry creek beds) are now flowing and providing beavers with brand-new home-site options.

Beavers are essentially aquatic and require water in the form of a pond, stream, lake or river for habitat.

The aquatic mammals live in colonies of six or seven and build both burrows and dams. They can be found in just about every corner of Texas except for the Llano Estacado region and most of the Trans-Pecos.

According to TPWD biologist Gary Calkins, as unpopular as beavers are with some property owners, their activity is most often good for the land. In fact, says Calkins, "Their dams may help minimize flood events, recycle nutrients into the ecosystem, remove sedimentation from our water supply and produce cleaner water for our use. The areas around the ponds become much more fertile and productive due to the nutrients the ponds collect. This can lead to a much higher diversity of plants and animals using those areas."

But other landowners aren't as delighted as Rebecsek when beavers move onto their property. "I've tried to coexist with

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↑ **Though some property owners find beaver damage annoying, biologists point out that the animals' handiwork can actually be beneficial.**

them," explains Smithville-area landowner Paul Alexander, "but when they started girdling my oak trees, I decided it was time for them to go."

Indeed, Calkins confirms that the primary negative associated with beavers involves landscape tree damage. "This is due to either flooding, which will kill the trees, or from them girdling and eating the bark from the trees. Either way it results in dead trees, which is very noticeable and is what draws the negative image of the animal," he says.

It's important to note that, for property owners like Alexander, TPWD does not get involved in beaver control. "We pri-

marily give landowners information about beaver activity and how they can coexist with beavers," says TPWD biologist Meredith Longoria, who is based in Bastrop. Those who prefer that the animals be removed are directed to Texas Wildlife Damage Management Services (wls.tamu.edu).

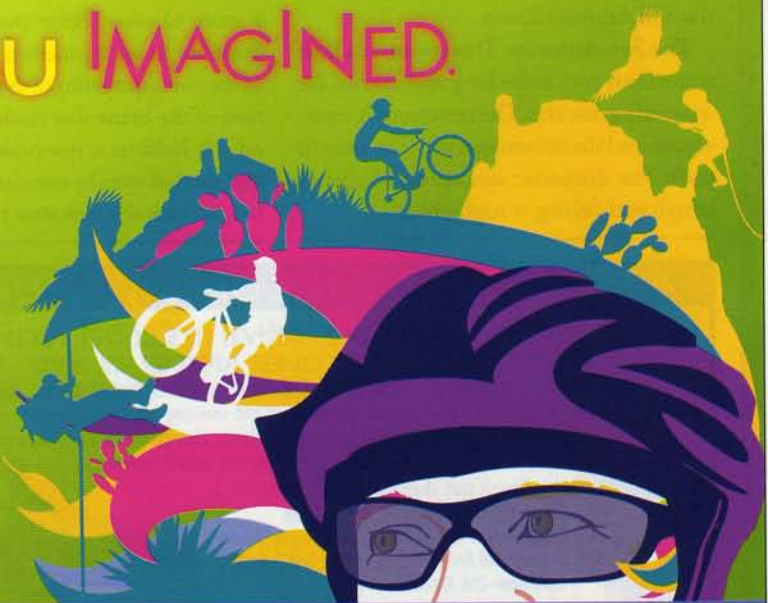
For more information about beavers and their role in your land management goals, locate your regional TPWD wildlife biologist at www.tpwd.state.tx.us/landwater/land/habitats/. A list of Texas Cooperative Extension county offices can be found at county-tx.tamu.edu/. ★

— Mary O. Parker

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