

Emailed testimony from Andrea Shortsleeve, February 7, 2025

Good Morning, Representatives –

On January 29, 2025, Brehan Furfey, Wildlife Biologist with the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department), testified to the House Committee on the Environment regarding beaver ecology, behavior, and population status in Vermont and the region, and about programs designed to benefit beavers, other wetland dependent wildlife, and the wetland habitats that support them. During testimony, the Department stated that beavers may be at or near their biological carrying capacity. This statement was intended as a broad characterization of the Department's extensive knowledge and experience about the abundance and distribution of beavers on the landscape of Vermont but was not meant to be taken literally. As the Department accurately stated, we do not know the number of beavers that currently comprise the population in Vermont, nor have we completed an assessment of the full extent of suitable habitat to support a certain size population of beavers in Vermont.

The Department presented data and information demonstrating our knowledge that beavers are abundant and widely distributed throughout the Vermont landscape and appear to be occupying much of the known suitable habitat. Relatedly, because beavers can exhaust food supplies associated with some wetland habitats it's important to have unoccupied habitat for beavers to colonize as they need to shift around on the landscape. Based on the number of human/beaver conflicts that the Department is aware of and the fact that those occurrences have increased over time, we speculate that we are reaching social carrying capacity of the beaver population; that is, the number of beavers on the landscape that the public is willing to tolerate based on conflicts with property, infrastructure, and public safety.

The Department explained the benefits of our beaver baffle program and how we provide technical assistance to private landowners and municipalities to address such conflicts safely and effectively, most of which involve non-lethal strategies and encourage coexistence. Lastly, as Will Duane, Land Acquisition Coordinator for the Department, testified, we are continuing to expand suitable habitat for beavers and other wetland dependent wildlife through our wetland conservation and restoration program. Please reach out if there are any questions, thank you and enjoy the weekend!

Respectfully,
Andrea

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