



MEMORANDUM
Rice Creek Watershed District

Date: January 9, 2024
To: RCWD Board of Managers
From: Ashlee Ricci, Drainage & Facilities Manager
Subject: RCWD Public Drainage System Beaver Management Policy – Updated

Introduction

The District intends to memorialize its protocols for beaver management as related to its public drainage authority and obligations. This policy does not apply to lawful trapping or other wildlife management practices unrelated to the District’s activities.

Background

Rice Creek Watershed District staff through public drainage inspection and increasing landowner reports are aware of beaver activity and dams resulting in obstructions on public drainage systems. In the past, these obstructions have been located primarily in the rural portions of the District. As the land in the District continues to rapidly develop, occurrences on the public drainage systems have increased.

The District has a legal obligation under MS 103E to maintain the efficiency of the public drainage systems within its jurisdiction for the benefitting parties. As part of addressing its obligation, the District has established a comprehensive policy on the maintenance of the public drainage system. The comprehensive policy acknowledges the need to evolve and adapt to meet emerging and ever changing water management issues. It further acknowledges the need to serve current land uses, planning for future land use changes while weighing other resource issues and needs.

The purpose of this memo is to document the considerations the District utilizes specific to the management of nuisance beaver. This policy does not pertain to emergency situations where the Board and staff may choose to act directly for the benefit of the public.

Considerations

Beavers play an important role in Minnesota’s ecosystems and provide many benefits. They can also become nuisances and cause property damage. Guidance from the MN Department of Natural Resources (MN DNR) and the United States Department of Agriculture on effective management strategies were considered. The interactions between beaver populations and urban environments can be especially detrimental due to the close proximity of structures and stormwater features. The jurisdiction of the Watershed District as the drainage authority, along with the unique landscape which is relatively flat and has limited stormwater storage, results in damage by beavers that is challenging to manage effectively. Lethal and nonlethal options are considered by staff for beaver management and the District considers both options for best results. It is important to note that the District’s beaver management activities do not limit or intend to interfere with landowners’ or others’ ability to lawfully trap or undertake other beaver management activities.

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When new beaver activities (chew marks, downed trees, food caches, etc.) are identified along a public drainage system, staff are to increase the frequency and focus of inspections for diminished functional capacity of the public drainage system. If a dam is found on a public drainage system during inspection and the below criteria are met, the beavers shall be removed:

1. As determined by District Drainage Staff, a blockage exists in the drainage system that is directly contributing to reduced efficiency of the system.
2. As determined by District Drainage Staff, non-action (leaving the dam in place) would result in upstream or downstream impacts (reduced capacity, increased erosion, flooding, damage to public infrastructure or private property, etc.).
3. As determined by District Drainage Staff, non-action (leaving the dam in place) may result in increased surface water ponding that would limit future Drainage Authority abilities to repair the drainage system.
4. As determined by District Drainage Staff, alternative nonlethal options would not achieve the objectives of the Watershed Management Plan or the legal obligations of MS 103D and 103E.

Once District staff have determined the need to remove beavers, the following measures¹ should be considered and/or communicated to the hired contractor. District Staff will encourage the contractor to utilize the safest methods possible given site conditions and the following considerations.

1. Is the contractor licensed in MN?
 - a. Contractors must comply with all local, state, and federal regulations.
2. Are permits needed to remove the animals?
 - a. As directed by MN DNR: Federal, state, county, township or local governmental employees, while on duty as a representative of that government do not need a permit while doing beaver removal on land under their jurisdiction.²
3. How is the dam accessed?
 - a. All work on the public drainage system should be accessed from the public drainage system right-of-way.
 - b. If access outside of the right-of-way is needed, District Staff must coordinate with the landowner(s) and the District will obtain a statement of indemnification from the landowner.
4. Is the dam located near public infrastructure (stormwater BMPs, trails, roads)?
 - a. Staff should consider public visibility and safety and communicate the need to address safety to the contractor.
 - b. Staff will coordinate as needed with the local municipalities and road authorities to expeditiously remove beavers and obstructions to prevent property damage.

¹ This list is intended to serve as general guidance. The District and all hired contractors shall adhere to all applicable laws.

² This policy is subject to change with federal, state, and local regulations.