

Media Release

21 July 2022

Fisheries conservation organisations ask the government to review beaver protection.



Dam created by beavers on Exmoor

Source: National Trust / PA Wire, from [BBC news](#).

Fisheries conservation organisations have come together to ask the government to reconsider plans to give protected status to the re-introduced Eurasian beaver.

Beavers were common in Britain until hunted to extinction 400 years ago. They have been re-introduced to a number of places in Scotland and England under licence since 2009. During that time their effect on the environment has been studied. The wetlands their dams produce create increased diverse habitats for wildlife, and in slowing down water run-off, they can limit flooding downstream.

However, we are worried about the effect on fish, in particular our already severely stressed and declining populations of sea trout and Atlantic salmon (itself a protected species). We are concerned that the dams can be obstacles for fish trying to complete their life cycle:- migrating to spawn, naturally distributing as young and then being vulnerable to predation.

As conservation organisations, we recognise the contribution beavers can make to aquatic biodiversity and flood risk. However, we remain concerned that there have been insufficient studies on the impacts of beaver dams on fish movement and their ability to complete their lifecycle and reproduce.

Beavers are spreading along rivers as they reproduce and there have also been a number of unlicensed introductions to other rivers, so we are concerned about their uncontrolled proliferation.

Defra has delayed providing protected status to the beaver as [reported on 20 July](#), and we have written to Defra to ask that any protection framework be sufficiently flexible and responsive to allow immediate measures to control beaver populations where they are disrupting fish migration.

We support the need to protect wildlife, and to provide protection to some species. However, as protection in this case would hinder the ability to control beaver populations, even those illegally introduced, from impacting protected fish species, we call upon Defra to use this delay to improve the framework so that the protection doesn't cause unintended damage to wild fish populations.

David Bunt, Institute of Fisheries Management's Chief Executive said:

"The potential impacts that beavers can have on salmon, trout and sea trout are of concern to us. Before beavers become a protected species, we call on Defra to ensure there is an effective and bureaucracy-free management framework in place.

For more information contact:

[Institute of Fisheries Management](#)

David Bunt

david.bunt@ifm.org.uk

[Wild Fish](#)

Nick Measham

nick@wildfish.org

[Wild Trout Trust](#)

Shaun Leonard

director@wildtrout.org

[Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust](#)

Dylan Roberts

droberts@gwct.org.uk

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