

## **Concise Explanatory Statement Beaver Relocation Permits**

### **Rules amended as part of this rulemaking:**

N/A

### **Rules repealed as part of this rulemaking:**

N/A

### **Rules created as part of this rulemaking:**

WAC 220-450-230 Beaver relocation permits – Requirements and restrictions.

#### **1. Background/Summary of Project:**

Through this rulemaking, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) is establishing a new section, 220-450-230 Beaver relocation permits – Requirements and restrictions within WAC Chapter 220-450, Wildlife in captivity and wildlife rehabilitation. The agency's purpose for this rule is to create a permit program allowing individuals to offer relocation as an alternative to lethal removal of conflict beaver. The Beaver Relocation Permit Program has existed as a pilot program since 2019. The program offers an alternative to lethal removal of conflict beavers and provides education and support for individuals and non-profits as they perform relocations around the state. It is a requirement of the program that only beavers causing conflict can be relocated. Since its beginning, the program has successfully relocated over 80 beavers with the collaboration of WDFW Landowner Services Division, certified Wildlife Control Operators, and permitted licensed trappers. This new section codifies the aspects of the pilot program we have found successful. This rule will create the permitting program to oversee the individuals performing beaver relocations.

#### **2. Reasons for adopting the rule:**

The rule should be adopted to allow for the Beaver Relocation Permit Program to continue beyond the pilot stage, offering a legal alternative to lethal removal.

#### **3. Differences between the text of the proposed rule and the rule as adopted:**

None

#### 4. Public comments, response to comments, and consideration of comments

##### Support

**Comment:** Beavers have positive effects on wetland habitats.

**Response:** Yes – beavers modify habitat to increase their own survival, but these actions reach far beyond the individuals creating these changes. Beaver modifications can recharge groundwater stores, minimize extreme water events downstream, increase riparian habitat diversity and abundance, and improve fire resiliency in streams, rivers, and wetlands. These changes positively affect animal species occupying or utilizing these spaces, including insects (abundance, diversity), birds (abundance, diversity), fish (abundance, size), and mammals (abundance, diversity).

**Comment:** Relocation is a humane option to conflict instances and should be legalized.

**Response:** WDFW’s mandate includes management, preservation, protection, and perpetuation of wildlife. WDFW agrees that offering relocation through this program as an alternative to lethal removal when coexistence alone is not sufficient is a humane method of control, as well as other possible management approaches to human-wildlife conflict. Trapping, transport, and handling requirements outlined in the program ensure humane treatment of beavers throughout each step of the relocation process.

**Comment:** This program has been successful so far and should be allowed to continue.

**Response:** We are grateful and proud of the immense amount of work and care our relocators have put into this program and into relocations to date. In WDFW’s 2022 evaluation of the pilot program, we determined the program met the outlined goals of safe and humane treatment of beavers, beaver survival and establishment at release sites, mitigation of property damage and reduced beaver lethal removal, and efficient implementation of the program. We hope to support our relocators in greater capacity after the adoption of this rule.

**Comment:** Relocation should be legalized, but close trapping in release sites.

**Response:** Trappers are frequent partners of our relocation program, though we understand the perceived conflict between relocators and trappers. Trappers are interested in the perpetuation of the species and tend to avoid relocation sites when relocators post signs communicating the presence of a newly relocated beaver. Nevertheless, this conversation is ongoing, and we are looking for site-specific solutions to make sure both recreation and relocation are successful.

**Comment:** General support for the species and/or rule.

**Response:** We appreciate the enthusiastic support for all native wildlife, especially this species!

### **Opposition**

**Comment:** Relocation is a waste of effort.

**Response:** It is true that beavers do not always stay in the locations chosen for their release. The primary objective of the Relocation Permit Program is to offer an alternative to lethal control of beavers, so relocation is considered a success in any instance where beavers are permitted to survive. Individual relocators and relocation groups may have restoration goals for specific locations, but this is separate from WDFW's main objective.

**Comment:** Beavers cause too much damage and should not be relocated.

**Response:** The rule establishes processes so that beaver release sites are carefully selected for areas where future conflict with infrastructure is minimized if not eliminated. The training that WDFW provides for permitted relocators also includes a small component of beaver coexistence training, and in many cases, relocators can prevent future damage at the conflict site without requiring relocation or lethal control. We hope to expand the coexistence component of this program in the future.

**Comment:** Permits should not be necessary to remove or relocate beaver.

**Response:** Relocating wildlife is not a trivial matter. To ensure humane treatment, the minimization of future conflict and pathogen spread, and to learn more about the biology and habitat needs of the species, the permit program established in this rulemaking allows WDFW to require training on how to best care for beaver and to relocate beaver successfully.