

# The Massachusetts Experience

## Unintended Consequences or Nothing is Black and White

The story of how a trapping ban resulted in the killing and waste of beaver, the destruction of wetland habitat, and increasing costs to towns around the state.

**B**eaver are a “keystone” species that create habitat for many other fish and wildlife. They are critical to a healthy ecosystem.

Increased development resulting in the encroachment of roads, driveways, and other human infrastructure into potential or existing habitat increases the risk of human/beaver conflicts.

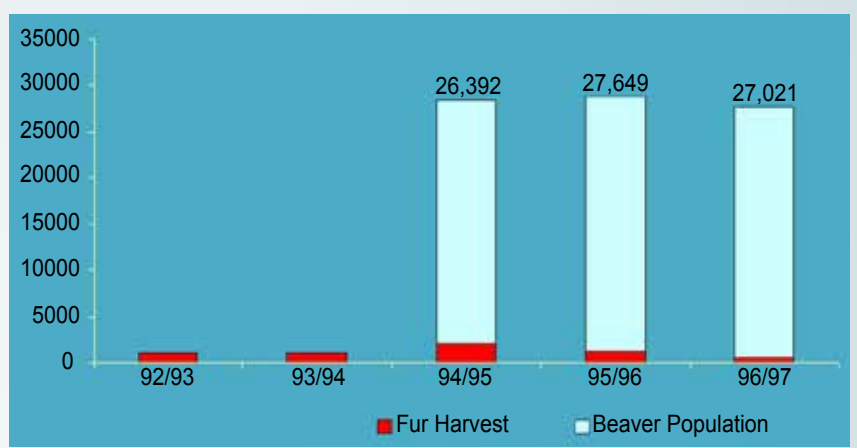
Maintaining public tolerance and support for beaver and the wetlands they create requires many different creative tools including beaver baffles (water control structures), education, and in some cases population control.



**Before 1996**, the Massachusetts Department of Fish and Wildlife managed beaver, and most furbearer populations through three mechanisms:

- Education
- Research and Surveys
- Regulated Harvest

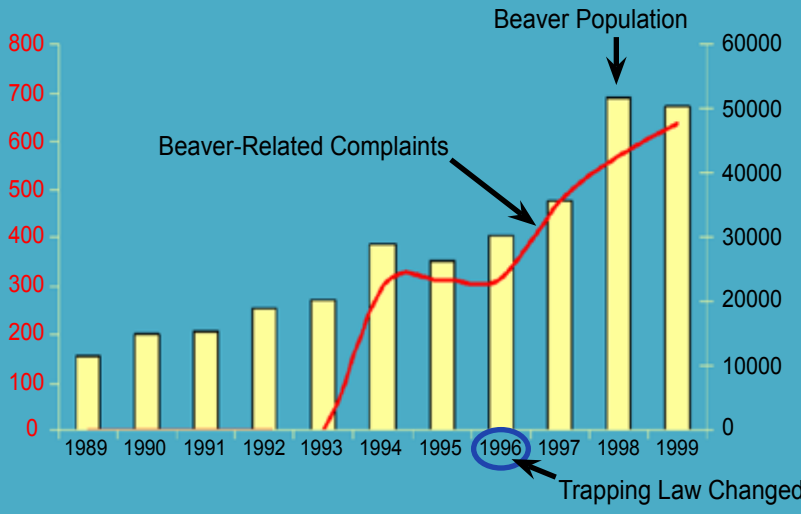
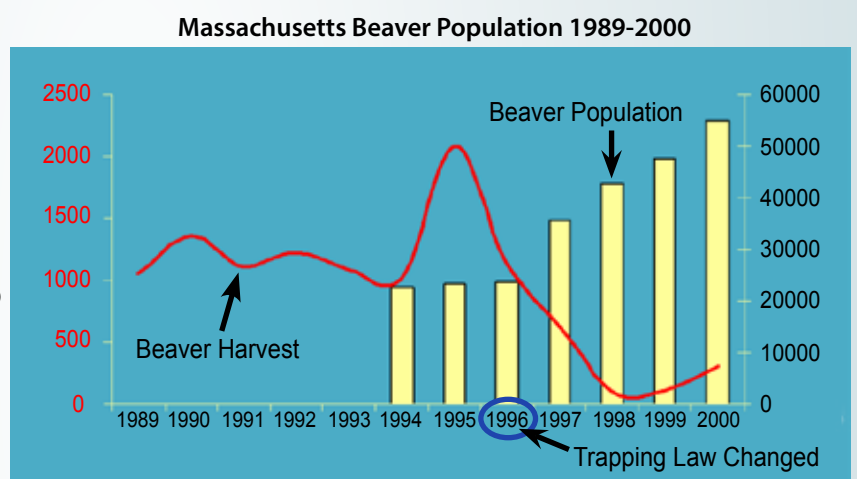
**1,000** beavers were annually harvested through regulated harvest by trappers, which played a crucial role in resolving human/wildlife conflicts and stabilizing the beaver population.



**1996** Massachusetts passed a law that greatly restricted the use of traditional beaver trapping methods, resulting in...

Beaver harvest dropped from **1,000 to 98**

Beaver population doubled to over **50,000** by 2000



**90%** increase in beaver-related complaints

Massachusetts Department of Fish and Wildlife spending a majority of their resources addressing and resolving beaver conflicts.

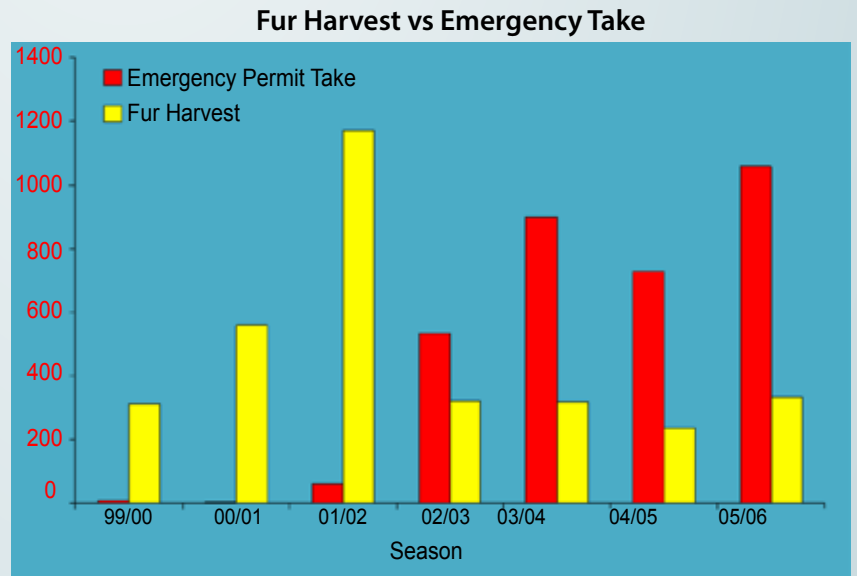
Massachusetts legislature allowed the issuing of “Emergency Permits” to municipalities, letting approved applicants:

- Trap any time of year
- Use body-gripping traps
- Alter dams

Permits are issued only after damage has occurred and only if this damage poses a risk to human safety. There is **NO** reporting requirement.

Reactive management resulted in an increased cost to towns.

- Worcester County: **\$4,000 to \$21,000/year** from 1998-2002
- Leicester: Infrastructure damage to a reservoir cost **\$80,000**
- Spencer: **\$25,000** in 2001 to keep culverts free of debris
- As many beaver are trapped today as prior to the ban at a much higher cost - averaging **\$300/beaver**



Most trapped beaver are not utilized but simply discarded.

### BOTTOM LINE

The banning of regulated trapping did not stop the harvest of beaver. It just resulted in the killing, waste, and public disregard of these important species *AND* Massachusetts lost a valuable tool to manage furbearer populations, deal with human/wildlife conflicts, and collect important biological data.