**Town of Landgrove- Summary Beaver / Wetlands Findings Summer 2023**

The following document is a summary of site visits conducted by the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife and Trout Unlimited during the summer of 2023, and contains excerpts from both reports. Both agencies were engaged by the Town to assess the beaver activity near Luerich Field and to provide recommendations going forward, coinciding with the Wetlands Restoration Permit and associated efforts which are currently underway.\*

There have been conflicts with beavers in this area off and on for many years. Issues arise when beavers dam the culvert that accesses the field. Beavers have also dammed downstream from the culvert. At the time the assessments were done, the height of the beaver dam did not appear to be creating any issues. The water flow was relatively low, so it only seems to be an issue during periods of extended wet weather.

The habitat in the area is considered a good beaver habitat. Beavers primarily feed on trees including maple, willow, aspen, alder and dogwood, most of which are present around the site. It is likely that beavers will persist in the area for several more years, until they deplete the food source, and will be forced to abandon the location. At that time, it may take a couple of years or more for the habitat to support beavers again. This is a natural cycle that sees a rise and fall in beaver populations without intervention from humans.

From the Department of Fish and Wildlife:

“It is important to understand that the area surrounding Utley Brook is part of the floodplain and periodic flooding is expected and healthy for the aquatic system.

Beaver created wetlands play an important role in the ecosystem and provide great habitat for many fish and wildlife species. These same wetlands also have many benefits for people. They help slow the flow of water and help reconnect streams to floodplains. They can also absorb a tremendous amount of water and improve water quality by filtering sediments and pollutants.

The challenge is that beaver activity can negatively impact public and private infrastructure.”

There were a few options the town considered to mitigate the conflicts:

1. At the culvert, an exclusion fence could be installed to prevent the beavers from plugging it and allowing the culvert to function as intended. However, if the beavers continue to build the downstream dam higher, it could eventually impact the culvert.
2. Installation of beaver baffles: The beavers may be limited by the relatively low volume of water, so the Department’s design of beaver baffles would not function well at the beaver dam due to the shallow water.
3. The town could trap the beavers. This would legally be done by a licensed trapper during the regulated trapping season (4th Saturday in October – end of March) to allow the animals to be fully utilized for their fur and meat. However, the beaver population will return so this will have to be done every year until the beavers exhaust their food supply, which would happen faster if the beavers were left as is.

NOTE: The State of Vermont law allows landowners to protect their property from damage caused by furbearing animals, which would allow the beavers to be removed outside of the regulated trapping season. The Town would not be responsible for these efforts.

1. Remove the current undersized culvert on the town property leading to the softball field. The pipe is an easy draw for the beaver and then being undersized is even easier to fill with material and block. Then add a bridge that would support pedestrians and a mower. The easiest (and likely cheapest) would be a boardwalk-style wooden bridge of a width that would accommodate a zero-turn mower. The culvert removal and pedestrian bridge could be tied into the current Wetland Restoration permit without the need for anything additional.
2. Wetlands Restoration: The sand pile removal project which is currently underway will also be beneficial. When this is completed, it will allow for the possibility of wetlands restoration, and could potentially give the beaver an out-of-the-way place to be.

The Town is certainly sensitive not only to the ongoing use of Leurich Field and the inconvenience that the occasional flooding can cause, but also to the vital role that beavers play in the overall health of the Landgrove ecology as a keystone species.

Since there is no perfect solution to this ongoing issue, the Landgrove Select Board has opted for a multipronged approach:

1. The Town will continue its efforts to restore the vital wetlands in the interest of retaining the naturalized environment that the Town residents have always enjoyed for generations. By virtue of this, the beavers will contribute naturally to this effort and eventually exhaust their food supply at which point they will move their habitat to a more favorable area.
2. The Town will continue the Sand Shed construction and Sand Pile move. When this project is completed, it will allow the Town to further evaluate the Wetlands Restoration efforts and work with Trout Unlimited to assess if Wetlands Expansion is favorable.
3. Landowners can protect their property as allowed by the State of Vermont by removing the beavers from their property. The Town will take no responsibility for these decisions.

*\*Trout Unlimited has been guiding and proposing financial support for the stream restoration at Utley Brook as the Town moves to remove the sand pile and equipment from streamside to the new site. Their wetlands restoration design is currently on file in the Town office.*