Appendix 6

Governance Structures

Version	V1
Date	5.07.2.19
Date of next review	31.10.19

Governance Structures

The future of beavers in England will be subject to detailed consideration by Defra / Natural England before 31st March 2020. A decision that allows beaver populations to remain must also include detailed clarification on which management techniques and activities would be permitted, under what circumstances and if any relevant conditions apply. This will exert a significant influence over the governance structures that are developed, and the human and financial resources required to effectively oversee the management of the beaver population and their associated impacts.

The key to post-trial beaver management success will be to establish an effective, locally led, nationally supported, management regime that will give confidence that the benefits of supporting the beaver's reintroduction can be delivered whilst efficiently minimising and mitigating any potential negative impacts.

The ROBT Steering Group recommends that decisions about the management of beavers should occur at the catchment scale and be guided by the key stakeholders and communities living alongside the beavers.

The establishment of a Beaver Management Group for the River Otter catchment is suggested as the preferred model for overseeing the implementation of a beaver management strategy. The River Otter catchment is a convenient size (c.250km²) and is benefitted by many stakeholder and community groups that operate at, and reflect, this scale. Although entirely suited to the size of river networks found in Devon, it is fully recognised that this would not so readily apply to other geographies.

The group would have the following purpose:

To oversee the successful development, delivery and review of the River Otter Beaver Management Strategy.

The Group would take an inclusive, consensus building approach to ensure:

- the considerable benefits arising from beaver reintroduction were maximised;
- the interests of key stakeholders and those likely to be negatively impacted were fully recognised; and
- that beaver welfare and conservation status was optimised at all times.

The group would have a membership selected from, but not limited to, the following organisations:

- Statutory agencies – Defra group;
- Local Authorities;
- Conservation and land management organisations;
- Landowners and landowner representatives;
- Major infrastructure providers e.g. Network Rail;
- South West Water;
- Community representatives;
- Veterinary / zoological representatives;
- River users;
- Game and wildlife managers; and

- Fisheries groups.

The BMG would be supported by a Beaver Officer (with potential additional Field Officer staff resource) and a team of highly trained volunteers and contacts to implement different aspects of beaver survey, monitoring and management.

The BMG partnership would lead the dissemination of information regarding beavers, their ecology and management, ranging from the positive benefits they bring, to the methods for dealing with various conflicts.

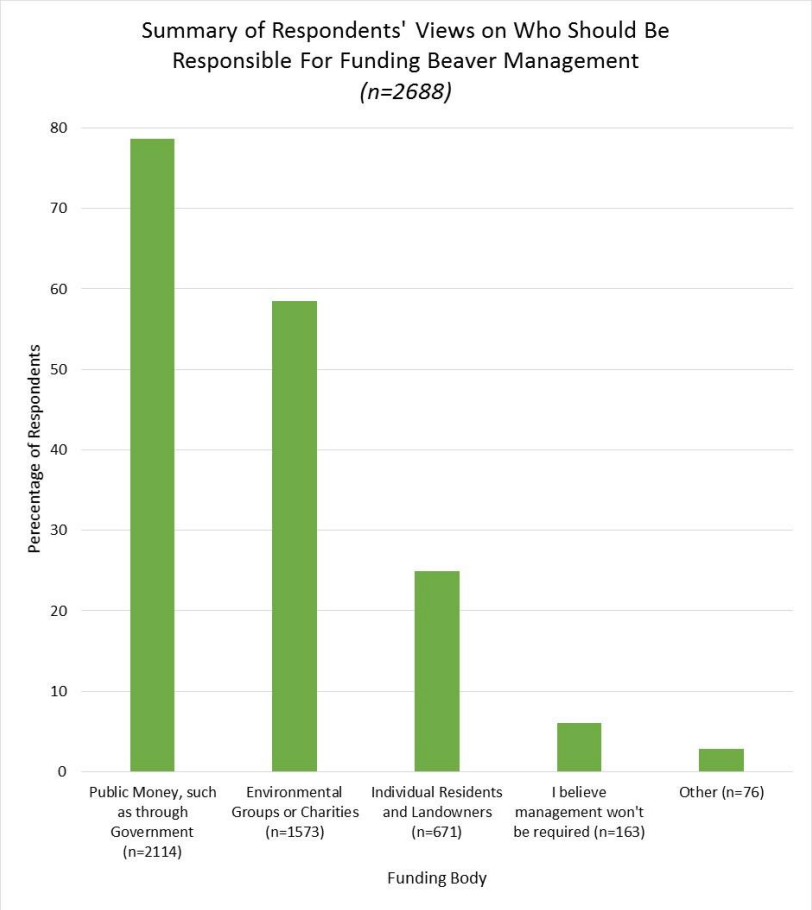
Funding could be devolved to the BMG who would ideally advise on (and potentially have a role in supporting scheme administration) an Environmental Land Management scheme for financially supporting landowners who provide space for natural riparian processes and/or mitigation measures. Figure 6.1 shows responses to a national survey conducted by the University of Exeter regarding who should be responsible for funding beaver management.

The Beaver Management Group would ensure a strategic approach to the management of beavers is adopted. This would be based on a sound scientific understanding of their distribution and conservation status within the catchment. The strategic translocation of beavers would also be overseen by this group, including the liaison with other catchment Management Groups elsewhere to facilitate the exchange of beavers into other catchments (if appropriate) and ensuring exemplary management of genetic health within populations.

The partners would be responsible for ensuring a wide range of education materials are available through the provision of factsheets and webpages and disseminated through their networks.

It is important to recognise the effectiveness and potential of the current ROBT governance and staff structures to be adapted to fulfil the requirements of the BMG during this phase of reintroduction. The ROBT Management and Steering Groups include individuals from a broad spectrum of organisations. To date the project delivery team, research scientists and consultants have successfully delivered the outcomes which have been defined and have built strong relationships within the catchment. A comprehensive review would however be required to ensure the group were able to oversee a new challenging phase of the project.

Figure 6.1. Perception of management responsibility.



Beaver Officer

Any approach to the management of a reintroduced native species needs to clearly demonstrate the adherence to the management hierarchy. Education and information provision provide the foundation from which communities learn to live with beavers. Beaver experts need to be readily available for those seeking support and advice on real and perceived beaver conflicts and associated management. The use of avoidance, deterrent and mitigation measures needs to be demonstrated to be inappropriate or unsuccessful before more invasive interventions are considered.

A Beaver Officer, with support from a Field Officer would lead the implementation of the Management Strategy with support from key stakeholder contacts and fully trained volunteers, which would embed the management hierarchy throughout.

The size of the team required would depend on the size of the beaver population, land-use and land ownership patterns, and the interventions required. In the River Otter between 2020 and 2025, it is envisaged the Management Group would require 1.5 FTE, supported by a small team of specialist volunteers assisting with different aspects of management such as population surveys and practical work (e.g. tree protection, and installing and maintaining electric fencing). This resource would need to be kept under close review and may need to rise during the period 2025 to 2030.

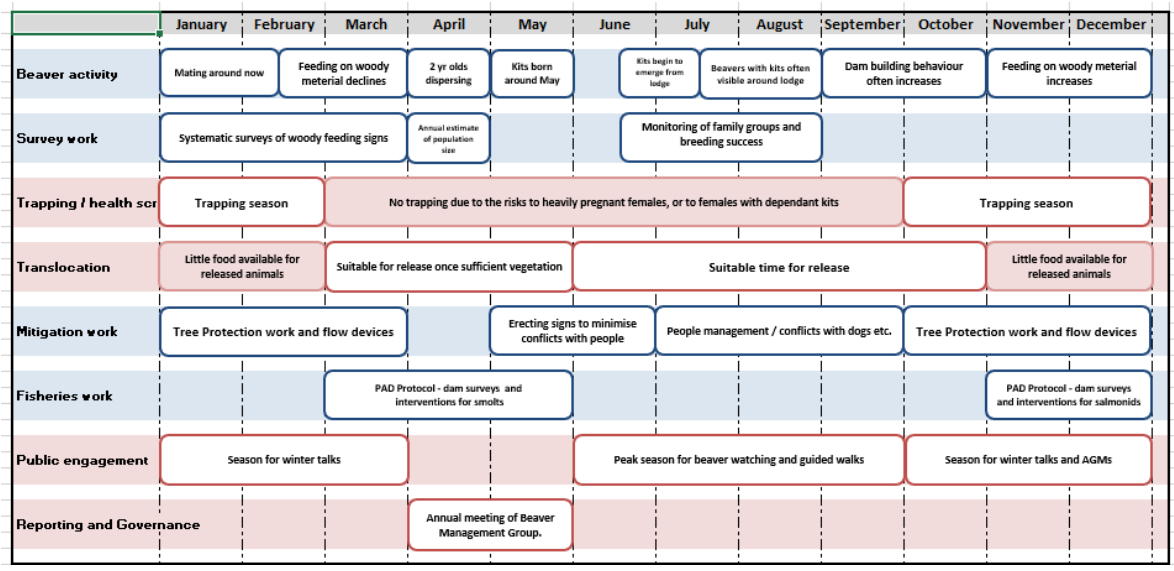
The key to success will be that the Beaver Officer is mandated to operate quickly and effectively, with the powers to make rapid decisions about best management solutions. In the case of extraordinary situations or high risk to livelihoods the Officer would need to be able to secure support and direction from representatives of the Beaver Management Group. In the event that European Protected Species legislation applies, it may be necessary for a Class License to be in place covering the work of the Officer and other named parties, to permit their effective and efficient reaction to a broad range of issues which arise.

The administration / secretarial role for the Beaver Management Group would be fulfilled by the Beaver Officer, who is likely to be employed and hosted by one of the member organisations.

Seasonality of beaver work

The experience of the ROBT is that beaver work tends to be highly seasonal. For the purposes of resource allocation and project planning, figure 6.2 should be used as a guide. The autumn and winter are particularly busy periods for dealing with management conflicts when beavers are focusing their feeding on woody material and using higher watercourse flows to build and maintain dams. Territory mapping using surveys of woody feeding signs are also conducted between January and March, and any trapping for tagging and health screening should also be conducted when females are not heavily pregnant or feeding kits. Management of fish passage conflicts is mostly carried out during the high autumnal flows when migratory salmonids are moving upstream to spawn – a period coinciding with increased dam building activity.

Figure 6.2 - Seasonality of beaver work – timings are approximate based on experience in Devon.



Governance evolution

The proposed governance of the Beaver Management Group for the River Otter is appropriate for this phase of beaver reintroduction. This phase, when we are relearning to live alongside beavers, has the following characteristics:

- Knowledge of beavers is held by a small number of experts in specific sectors;
- In general, there is enthusiasm from the local community for beavers and demand for information about them, including where they can be seen;
- There will be a general lack of awareness within society regarding the need to proactively manage the species;
- The levels of support and advice required for impacted stakeholders is often high;
- There is concern from those likely to be impacted over the unknown; misinformation risks heightening anxieties;
- Management interventions at all stages of the hierarchy will be introduced and new approaches trialled;
- New funding streams will need to be tested and trialled; and
- New relationships between stakeholders will be forged;

These characteristics place very specific demands on the intensity of dedicated resources required at this place and time. It is unrealistic to expect this model to be required and replicated across other catchments nationwide (where applicable) at comparable intensities. As we learn as a society to live alongside beavers, the geographies that Management Groups are responsible for are likely to significantly increase. The need for dedicated Beaver Officer staff will reduce over time and elements of this this role would be adopted by other catchment-based officers as appropriate.