

PUBLIC ATTITUDE ABOUT BEAVERS IN CROATIA AFTER 25 YEARS - GUIDELINES FOR COEXISTENCE

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INTRODUCTION:

Constantly **increasing beaver population** over the last **25 years in Croatia** has influenced **public attitudes** about the beaver. During the **first ten years** of recolonization, as beavers **gradually spread and appeared** in new locations, there was a general **enthusiasm** concerning beavers. After **15 years** from first reintroduction in some areas, **habitat carrying capacity was reached** and first **damages** were recorded. After **20 years** beaver **problems became a common occurrence**. In the past 3 years the beaver population has experienced a pronounced progression, which significantly affected the public's attitude, especially in areas of permanent beaver residence with high family densities. As part of the **LIFE BEAVER Project**, workshops were held with the aim of educating and informing the public.

METHODS:

During **5 workshops** (under name "**Coexistence with the beaver**") as part of the LIFE BEAVER project we **collected public opinion and suggestions** related to following topics: **beaver protection, protection from beavers, and coexistence with beavers**. From total of **150 participants**, we identified several concrete **views and guidelines**, of which we highlight the **10 most representative ones**.

1. Protection from beaver

- issues with beaver problems relative to dams, coastal erosion and agricultural damage
- establishment of preventative measures to reduce beaver damage

- need for completion and adoption of the Beaver Management Plan
- identification of defined management zones relative to beaver management
- required research to determine optimal beaver numbers and habitat capacity
- development of a compensation system for damages
- improved institutional coordination for the implementation of beaver protection and management

2. Coexistence with beavers

- improved communication and associated information systems
- need for balance between public acceptance and responsive management

3. Beaver protection

- importance for conservation and biodiversity in aquatic ecosystems

CONCLUSIONS:

Sadly **after 25 years** from the first beaver introduction in Croatia there is **still no Beaver Management Plan** nor was beaver protection status changed, regardless of high population densities. Although **beaver damage becomes more frequent**, with beaver dispersion and population increase, **public opinion still stays predominantly positive**. Collected **views and guidelines** should help in future **research** regarding beavers, creation of Beaver Management Plan and **public awareness** concerning beavers.