Collaboration keeps beaver habitat intact



Beaver dams at Taylor Creek are no longer being destroyed by the U.S. Forest Service. Photos/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

CAMP RICHARDSON – It depends on who one talks to whether beavers are destructive or one of nature's best engineers.

At 40 to 50 pounds, these mammals are no slouches in the animal kingdom. Being nocturnal, they are not often seen. However, their "work" is very evident. Usually it's in the form of dams or felling of trees.

This "work" that is done near civilization is what has the Sierra Wildlife Coalition and U.S. Forest Service partnering to maintain the animal's habitat and protect manmade structures.



Pipes carry water through the beaver dam and wire keeps them from plugging up.

Beaver dams were causing the $1 million stream profile center at Taylor Creek on the South Shore to flood. Removing the dams was futile. Killing this native species wasn't an ideal option.

Sierra Wildlife Coalition proposed painting some of the aspen trees in the area with a sand-latex mixture that would prevent the beavers from gnawing at them. It's worked. And unless one looks closely it is difficult to know the tree has been treated with anything.

The painting goes 5 feet up from the ground because beavers will cross the snow in the winter. It is winter when most trees are chewed.



Beavers leave behind

evidence of their work.

Levelers have been placed in the dams to allow water to keep flowing down stream while keeping the beaver structure in place. It almost looks like a rudimentary science project with the plastic pipes and wire-mesh cages.

Advocates are working to prevent the kokanee salmon from getting caught up in the diversion devices. However, with the fish not being native to the Tahoe, their survival is less of a concern to the federal agency.

While the devices are not working perfectly, it is a better scenario than repeatedly removing the dams – which is a costly and time consuming endeavor. It would cost about $40,000 to raise the trail, so the leveler method is the economically cheaper route.



Trees are painted to deter beavers from chewing them.

Beavers are good for the environment. The problem is people are living or recreating so close to their habitat so the good aspects get overshadowed.

According to the Sierra Wildlife Coalition, beaver ponds create wetlands, reduce erosion, decrease flood damage downstream, control soil erosion and help filter out sediment before it reaches Lake Tahoe.

The nonprofit, which is based in Tahoe City, has about seven volunteers who help with the installations and tree protection. Another 200 people are on the group's email list and keep the core group informed about beaver activity in the basin and Truckee area.

Beavers are in almost every creek in the region. This is why the Sierra Wildlife Coalition is working with agencies, homeowners and others wherever possible to have beavers and people coexist.

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Notes:

· Sherry Guzzi with the Sierra Wildlife Coalition will give a presentation about beavers July 31 at 8:30pm at Taylor Creek, Lake of the Sky Amphitheater on the South Shore. Cost is $5.