

Case Study: Nutria Management at the Yoncalla Log Pond

Prepared by: North Douglas Betterment

Background:

In May, 2012 North Douglas Betterment (NDB), a local nonprofit organization acquired 100 acres, located in the immediate vicinity of Yoncalla, that consisted of 80 acres that was a former mill site and log pond and 20 acres of wetland property. NDB is currently facilitating a planning process to identify the best use of the property to benefit area residents

(www.ndbetterment.org/pond) .

For the previous 35 years the log pond area was closed to public access and became severely overgrown with brush, primarily blackberry. Currently, the area open and is gaining in popularity with local residents who enjoy hiking in the area, often with their dogs. Officially, the area is in the “inventory and assessment” phase of the land use planning process.

Action taken:

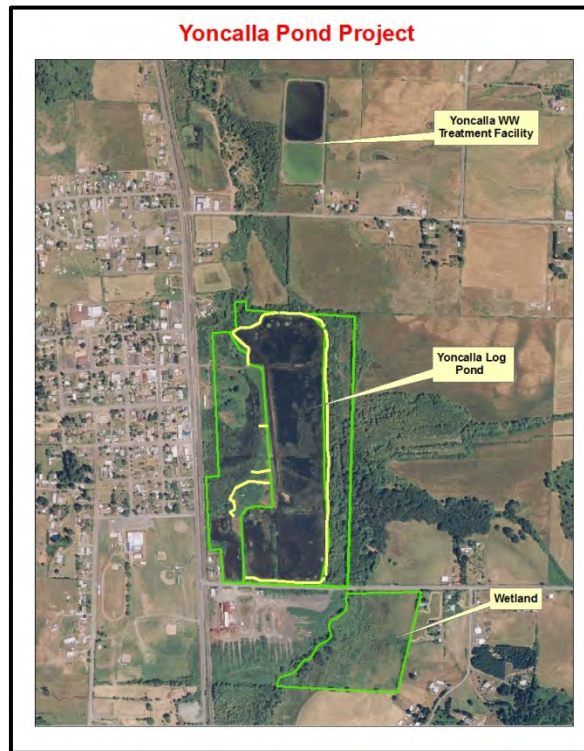
One of the first tasks was to clear the brush on surface of the pond dike (yellow line on map) to provide access to the property and to assess the condition of the dike. Exposure revealed that there were about thirty areas along the north and east side of the pond that had significant nutria damage (See photos page 2).

In November, 2012 an effort was made to repair some of the damage by using a backhoe to dig out and refill the burrows. Over 200 yards of fill material was brought in and compacted into the dike.

Concurrently, NDB contracted with the USDA APHIS Wildlife Service in Roseburg reduce the nutria population through shooting and / or trapping. Their initial plan was to conduct a “night shoot” but this proved to be ineffective when the disturbed waterfowl along the shoreline alarmed the nutria. Traps set in the brush along the runs leading to the pond were very effective but this approach was discontinued due to concerns related to the high human usage. The trapper, Jim Godfrey, then devised a floating trap designed to trap nutria while avoiding beaver and otter and reducing the potential for human contact (See photos page 5).

Results:

As of this date, 25 nutria have been killed through the trapping effort. However, perhaps more significantly, an unprecedented reduction in nutria sightings have been reported at the Yoncalla Wastewater Treatment facility located about one quarter mile north of the pond. It seems like an unlikely coincidence that this apparent reduction coincided with the nutria management activities at the pond. The neighbors on the north side of the pond have also previously complained of the high nutria population in the area. It is possible that the pond area was a major breeding ground that was affecting the entire area.



Dike Management: Brush clearing and nutria damage repair.



**Typical damage on the dike
Exposed after clearing**



Dike repair

Conclusions:

Several factors could have contributed to this apparent decline in nutria activity.

1. Clearing the top surface of the dike drastically reduced the amount of cover for the nutria. For thirty years the nutria were able to feed and breed unabated and undetected. Exposure of the area made them vulnerable to predation. The exposed strip intersects the highly used trails that access the pond water and also exposed many of their burrows.
2. Repairing the holes in the dike in November may have produced significant mortality on the nutria population. The backhoe operator reporting seeing nutria exiting the burrows as he worked on them and it is possible that some of them did not escape. Also, nutria that had lost the sanctuary of their burrows may have died due to exposure.
3. The trapping effort had the advantage of producing direct, measureable results. However, the constraints imposed on this activity by the active human use and concerns for non-target species present significant challenges. The trapping program is ongoing and is still being developed. Edited notes from Jim Godfrey, Roseburg APHIS, are included at the end of this report.

It is apparent that the dike clearing and burrow destruction has significantly reduced the habitat suitability for the nutria in the area. The exposed dike and increased public use provides an opportunity to monitor nutria activity and observe how they respond to these changes in their habitat. We intend to continue to develop and refine our trapping strategy. The local nutria population may never be fully completely eradicated but we hope that we will be able to keep the population at a reduced level.

Trapper Notes:

The following edited information came from notes supplied by Jim Godfrey
USDA APHIS Wildlife Services – Roseburg.

Pond Shoot

An attempt to do a night shoot at the pond failed because the movement of the disturbed waterfowl alarmed the nutria, causing them to hide.

Trapping on the crossover runs

This method was very effective. I used the smaller size 160 conibears and set them on the downhill side of dike down in the briars. I did this during some major rainstorms and bad weather and only had them out overnight. Still the concern of the public and pets far outweighed the success of catching the nutria around the dikes even though I set the traps down in the brush away from the traffic.

Cage Trap

I also used a cage trap or two. I lost one to high water below the dike and set the other one on one of the islands. They were not effective at catching nutria. They needed to be set along the dike next to the crossovers that we counted Kent but I didn't want the public messing with them and or stealing them so I avoided the top of the dike. The float sets were far more effective.

Float traps (see float trap photos):

I chose to build floats and set the traps on the floats. I set them next to large willows along the bank in the nutria travel ways. Any nutria swimming along the banks would see and smell the bait and lure and then climb on the floats and get trapped. The traps would dispatch the nutria and sink into the water with the dead nutria.

It worked great and no non-target animals were caught. The traps were away from the public and pets, out of sight and view from public. They could still enjoy their evening walks with their pets and not interfere with my efforts to reduce the nutria population.

To better improve the trapping efforts for next year I would eliminate the use of the conibear 160 trap and use a small leg-hold trap like a #1 or #1 1/2 coil-spring. I believe I would have caught more with this type of trap and had fewer misfired traps.

The Styrofoam float worked better and was smaller than the larger wood slat floats so I would invest in some Styrofoam for next year to build the floats. The wood slat floats became water logged and eventually sat much lower in the water. They were also large and cumbersome in and out of the boat. The drift boat worked great and offered greater stability and I could launch it anywhere along the dike. It glided over the water vegetation effortlessly compared to a flat bottom or "V" hulled boat. No motor was needed.



During 2012 the Pond had extensive water-shield growth

Float Traps



Wooden float traps



Styrofoam float trap

