

Controlling Animal Nuisances

While most wild mammals, birds, reptiles and invertebrate animals are beneficial, sometimes their behavior conflicts with peoples' interest and damage control is needed. Don't expect animal damage control to be 100% effective or permanent. The controls described here will reduce or eliminate nuisances but, in most cases, have to be reapplied from time to time.

Federal, state, and local laws regulate many damage control methods. Check with local or state law enforcement officers about regulations and permit requirements.

Muskrats and Woodchucks

Muskrats and woodchucks dig burrows that may cause pond bank cave-ins, weaken dams, or result in leaks. They prefer to dig in steep banks. Muskrats tunnel from beneath the pond surface while woodchucks typically tunnel into the high portions of the banks or dams.

Muskrats make burrow entrances 6"-18" below the water line, sometimes deeper. Burrows may penetrate banks or dams 9 feet or more, but the average length is 5 to 6 feet. The tunnel leads to a dry nest chamber above water level. Frequently muskrats also burrow upward from the nest chamber tunnel to the surface, thus creating a second burrow entrance high on the bank or dam.

Woodchucks, also called groundhogs, burrow into pond dams and banks well above the waterline. The burrows may penetrate 50 feet or more and rise to the surface creating a second burrow entrance on the other side of the dam, or well away

from the pond. The tunnels lead to underground nesting chambers and chambers for food storage, body wastes, and traps for water that enters the burrows.

Habitat Management

Eliminating or reducing habitat reduces or eliminates the attractiveness of banks and dams to woodchucks and muskrats. Maintain dams and banks in grasses such as fescue and brome. Eliminate all broad leafed plants, especially legumes like clover, alfalfa, and trefoil. Eliminate muskrat food, such as cattails, arrowhead, and other emergent plants. If the pond is not properly constructed, consider regrading the banks, and/or deepening the pond to reduce the zone where emergent plants grow (see chapter 3, Building Fish Ponds). To completely eliminate the possibility of muskrat and woodchuck damage to bank and dam, reinforce banks and dams with materials that will prevent burrowing. Reinforcing these embankments is the only way to completely prevent muskrat and woodchuck damage when the pond is located near other waterways, wetlands, or uplands that are in unmowed meadows, hay fields, or other agricultural uses.

Reinforcing the Shore and Dam

The shore and bank can be reinforced to deter muskrat or woodchuck burrowing in one of the following ways.

- Cover with at least 2 layers of rocks (called rip-rap) at least 6 inches in diameter from 3 feet below the low waterline to 3 feet above the normal waterline for

