

Q. If things do not go well and there is no alternative, is there an Exit Strategy to the trial reintroduction?

Yes. The Exit strategy to remove the beavers would be implemented in the event that:

1. Unsustainable and intractable detrimental effects arise as a result of the presence of beavers in the River Otter;
2. Any significant change that occurs to the financial underpinning or management structure of the project that threatens the project viability;
3. An unacceptable risk to human health, livestock or other wildlife becomes apparent;
4. There is an unsupportable level of mortality in the beaver population as a result of human intervention (not if malicious, deliberate or reckless activities), or natural mortality;
5. There is a majority request from stakeholders for removal of the beavers.

In the event that the exit strategy is triggered and the beavers have to be removed, the beavers may be:

1. Transferred to another UK reintroduction project;
2. Housed in captivity or zoological collections;
3. Neutered and returned to the river to live out their life-span in the wild;
4. Humanely put-down.

Q. What arrangements will be in place to manage the beavers during the trial?

A. The River Otter Beaver Trial (ROBT) will be drafting a beaver management strategy. It will be developed in consultation and agreement with statutory bodies that have a role in the management of riparian features, infrastructure, and flood mitigation. It will also include liaison and agreement with major riparian land owners / right holders.

The first essential phase of the development of the strategy will be the comprehensive survey of features / infrastructure and associated risk analysis arising from beaver activity. The document will detail the management that will be required, from monitoring of effects to direct interventions. Interventions will include measures to deter beavers from high risk locations (such as drainage culverts) through the use of fencing and other non-invasive techniques. The removal of beaver structures, such as dams, and also the relocation of beavers to less sensitive locations elsewhere in the catchment will also be detailed and employed if appropriate.

During the trial period, the strategy will be amended and adapted as more is learnt about the effects the beaver have and the best methods of avoiding and mitigating impacts. This document will inform future pragmatic beaver management protocols that will be recommended for adoption post trial.

Q. Will local landowners permit access to their land to monitor the beavers and their impacts?

A. DWT has secured in principle support for the ROBT to secure access to riverside land over the majority (>60%) of land lying between Budleigh Salterton in the south and Fenny Bridges in the north. Comprehensive landowner consultation will be ongoing throughout the trial period.

Q. What funds have been ring-fenced to support action in relation to negative impacts?

A. DWT and the Project Management Group have allocated significant staff resources to the ROBT to survey, monitor and effectively implement mitigation techniques. DWT has access to over 14 Reserve Officers that will be available in case of emergency. DWT staff have access to heavy machinery, tractors, river craft, cutting equipment, winches etc. In addition to licensed in-house tree surgeons we have allocated funds for external tree surgery time in case complex works are required. We have an annual contingency budget that will be focussed on mitigation works where required.

DWT will be asking that landowners contact them immediately if they see, or suspect, any problematic behaviour. The ROBT, working in conjunction with landowners and beaver management experts, will then determine what action needs to be taken e.g.:

- Take no further action;
- Remove the offending structure, in whole or in part;
- Assist the landowner with any repairs or remedial work, such as reinforcing a section of bank employing approved natural river engineering structures, or draining an area that has been flooded against their wishes;
- Arrange to remove some or all of the beavers and relocate them to another section of the river catchment;
- In an extreme case, arrange to remove the beavers from the sub-catchment entirely.

Such activities will normally be carried out free of charge, and the costs of such works have been built into the project budget. Labour costs will be kept low by using volunteers wherever possible. It is important to stress that in all likelihood the beavers will have some impacts up and down the catchment and landowners will be supported to adapt to a scenario where these become regarded "normal", and just one of a suite of natural forces impacting on the river and the floodplain. We will develop a methodology that assesses and categorises impacts, from negligible to significant/highly undesirable. This will be used as a guideline for taking action.

It is unlikely, but nevertheless conceivable, that during the five year project there may be one or more highly unusual cases where financial compensation could be considered. DWT has appropriate insurance cover in the event of any significant claims. A simple flow chart will be developed to support and evidence decisions made. A similar system was used to good effect with the Scottish Beaver Trial at Knapdale.