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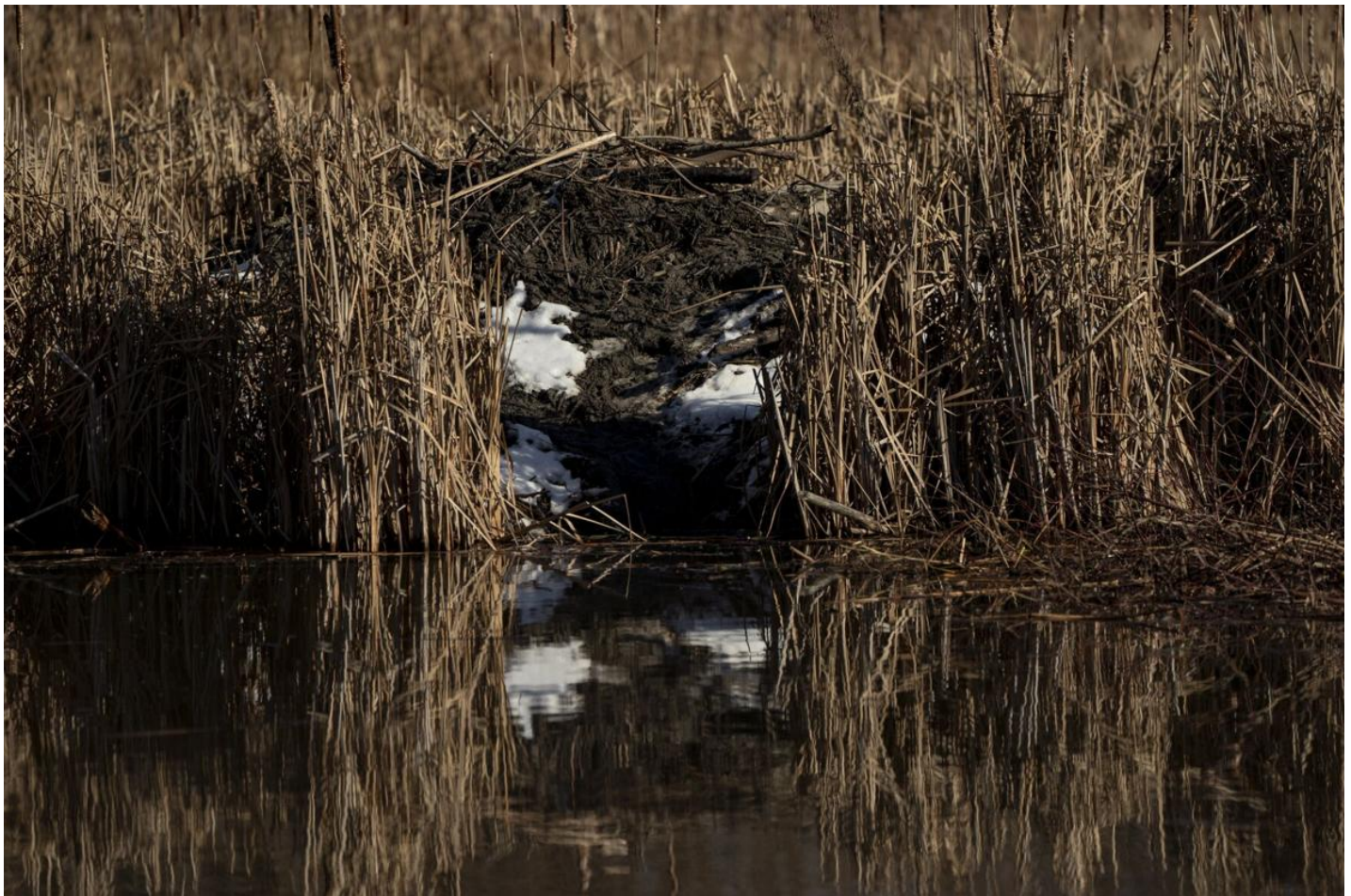
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EDITOR'S PICK

## **Dammed if they do, dammed if they don't: Orchard Park grapples with beavers**

**Barbara O'Brien**

Dec 14, 2023



A beaver lodge is visible from Birdsong Park Nature Trail in Orchard Park. Some residents, including Julie Wettlaufer, top left, are urging town officials to address the mammals, who have caused minor flooding, in a more humane way than euthanizing them.

Barbara O'Brien

**V**isitors might not see beavers being energetic at Birdsong Park Nature Trail, despite the “busy beaver” stereotype.

The tree-eating aquatic rodents are one of the attractions nonetheless at the site off Jewett Holmwood Road in Orchard Park.

Rory Curtis, who lives in the Birdsong subdivision, said the beavers are a big part of the park and the beauty of nature.

“To have a group of them here where we can watch them is a real privilege,” Curtis said. “They’re not particularly dynamic. They don’t do tricks. They just swim around, and occasionally you can see them working on the lodge, repairing the lodge, which is pretty spectacular to see.”

But to the Town of Orchard Park, the beavers are a nuisance, causing flooding and damage to the park. That’s why the Town Board hired a trapper to kill the beavers, and why a group of residents is trying to convince officials to employ nonlethal means of dealing with them.

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Five beavers in the Village of Orchard Park were not as lucky after they built a dam near Highland Avenue, and were killed. Village officials and nearby residents worried the dam would cause flooding of homes.

Town officials said flooding due to beaver dams has eroded parts of Birdsong Park trails, and the level of the water has increased and reached some of the wooden boardwalks, damaging them. Residents contend the boardwalks are nearly 20 years old, and have sustained normal wear and tear.

The town decided it needed outside help after parks workers knocked down two beaver dams at the park during the summer and the beavers repaired them.



Libby March/Buffalo News

Residents objected after the Town Board approved a contract with a trapper to kill the beavers, and the town put the trapping on hold. About a dozen residents met with Recreation and Parks Director Ed Leak to talk about alternatives.

Chief among the options is a pipe that would go through the dam, creating a permanent leak to lower the level of the pond. Such pond levelers use a long pipe that empties the water away from the dam. Boy Scouts installed a similar pipe years ago but it doesn't work anymore, Town Engineer Wayne Bieler said.

Village officials felt they had to act quickly when residents alerted them to a beaver dam near the Highland Avenue bridge.

"For us it was a very severe problem," Mayor Jo Ann Litwin Clinton said. "That is in a flood plain and if those beavers had continued we could have had a series of homes on that street become flooded, especially in the basement area."

Four beavers were trapped and killed the last weekend in October and a fifth was caught after that, Clinton said.

"It was important that we did move fast," she said, but it wasn't something she wanted to do. "I'm an animal lover. I don't like to do something like that."

New York State doesn't allow beavers to be relocated. A new location can cause stress because the animal is unfamiliar with sources of food and shelter. The official New York State mammal also is territorial and the addition of a new beaver can cause aggressive behavior with others already established in a natural setting.

Town Supervisor Gene Majchrzak said the town is waiting to see what proposals residents might present to deal with the flooding.

"The one thing that still isn't being solved is their food source, and their food source is bark," Majchrzak said. "Every day we wait there is more destruction."



This area at Birdsong Park Nature Trail in Orchard Park sometimes floods from pond runoff caused by beaver dams.

Libby March, Buffalo News

Residents have reached out to groups like the Beaver Institute and Beaver Deceivers, which install pond leveling devices that allow beavers to continue building their dam without causing water level to rise.

“It’s kind of a no-brainer,” said Julie Wettlaufer, among the town residents who would like the beavers to stay. “It’s a nature park. There’s an ecosystem that’s fine with some flooding, so control the flooding.”

The concerned residents started a private Facebook page, **Friends of Birdsong**, in hopes to set up a meeting with town officials and a representative of a group that can install the device.

Wettlaufer hopes to get a cost estimate soon.

There also are ways to keep beavers from chewing all the trees in an area, she said, such as covering tree bottoms with netting or fencing, or painting the base with a mixture of paint and sand.

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By Barbara O'Brien  
Reporter

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