

Muskrats

[Muskrats](#) are highly adaptable semi-aquatic mammals that can be found along riverbanks and marshes. Muskrat are commonly confused with [beaver](#) and [nutria](#). However, muskrats are smaller than both beaver and nutria. Muskrat have a long, bare tail that is flattened vertically, nutria have a long rat-like tail, and beavers have a large wide and flattened tail.

What kind of damage is caused by muskrats? Muskrats can cause damage to dikes, dams, banks, and road beds due to their burrowing.

Can a WCA write a depredation permit? Yes, a WCA can write depredation permits for muskrats. WDCAs that possess trapping licenses would not need to write a depredation permit during trapping season.

Can muskrats be relocated? Yes, muskrats can be relocated, but it must be onto private property with the permission of the landowner.

What can I do with sick or injured muskrats? There are licensed rehabilitators across the state that can take in injured orphaned wildlife. If the injury is not significant, advise individual to leave the animal alone. It should be able to recover without help. If the muskrat has a life-threatening injury or illness, it should be humanely euthanized and disposed of in a safe and sanitary manner.

Are there any safety concerns? No, however it is good practice to wear gloves when handling any animal.

Non-lethal Options:


- Exclusion
 - Fences can be used to keep muskrats from having access to an area. To be effective, the fence must be buried at least 12 inches in the ground to prevent the muskrats from being able to tunnel underneath.
- Habitat modification
 - Creating a gradually sloping bank (3:1 ratio or less) will make the area less favorable to muskrats (see diagram below).
 - As water levels rise and chambers become flooded, muskrat will create new chambers deeper and higher into the bank causing further damage. Keeping the water level stable will prevent muskrats from creating new den chambers.
- Relocation
 - Muskrats can be trapped under a depredation permit and relocated onto private property with the permission of a landowner. When relocating muskrat, a depredation permit is needed regardless of whether it is trapping season.

Lethal Options:

- Muskrats can be trapped during the trapping season with a valid trapping license. A landowner does not need to purchase trapping license to trap on his/her own property.
- Outside of the season, muskrat that are causing property damage can be trapped under a depredation permit.
- Muskrat in the act of causing property damage may be shot without a depredation permit as long as there are no local ordinances that would prevent take.


Identifying Nutria (*Myocastor coypus*)

Nutria
Invasive




Photos courtesy of Tony Northrup and Joyce Grass

Beaver
Native










Photos courtesy of Alaska DFG and Cheryl Reynolds

Muskrat
Native



Photos courtesy of N. Carolina State Parks and Merle Ann Laman



Whiskers/ head	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conspicuous white whiskers • Muzzle often white 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Black whiskers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fine, black whiskers • Muzzle may be white <p><small>Drawings courtesy of Danielle M. Crosier</small></p>
Tail	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tail rounded, rat-like, and sparsely covered in coarse hair • Tail still while swimming; body propelled by feet 	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tail broad and flat. • Tail flattened top-to-bottom • Slap water with tail when disturbed 	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tail flattened side-to-side • Tail used for swimming with rapid side-to-side serpentine motion
Body	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adult size: 10-20 pounds; body length to 2 feet, with 1 foot tail • Juveniles similar in size to muskrats • Hunched appearance on land 	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adult size averages 40 pounds • Length to over 3 feet, including tail 	 <p><small>Silhouettes courtesy of USFWS</small></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adult size: 2-5 pounds; body length up to 1 foot

