

# Greenway/Sensitive Lands

## NUTRIA FACT SHEET

### What are nutria?

Nutria, *Myocastor coypus*, are large South American rodents that have a stocky body, short neck, webbed feet, a long, round tail and inch-long, dark orange incisors. Adult nutria weigh about 15 pounds and consume about 25% of their body weight daily.

### Where did nutria come from?

Native to South America, nutria were first imported into the United States between 1899 and 1930 in an attempt to establish a fur farm industry. Many of the fur farms failed and the nutria were released into the wild.

### Where are nutria found in Vancouver?

Nutria are common in the wetlands around Burnt Bridge Creek and other places where there are waterways.



The solid line shows extensive damage caused by nutria in the Burnt Bridge Creek Greenway. Dotted line is original creek bank.

### Why are nutria a problem?

A non-native species, nutria ravage wetlands and impact the Burnt Bridge Creek Greenway because:

#### 1. They create stream bank instability and erosion

Nutria dig into soils to eat the basal and root portions of wetland plants, killing vegetation. The roots of marsh vegetation bind the soft organic marsh soils together. When this root fabric dies, the soils become susceptible to erosion, which ultimately results in stream bank instability, added sedimentation and reduced water quality, which impacts fish.

#### 2. They reduce habitat

Nutria feed on wetland plants, resulting in loss of vegetation and wildlife habitat. Loss of native

plants often leads to invasion of non-native species such as reed canarygrass, which offers little habitat value for wildlife.

#### 3. They force out native wildlife

Nutria out-compete native species such as muskrats and can decimate creek invertebrates. They are highly prolific. Adult female nutria can produce two to three litters per year. The number of young in a litter ranges from one to 13. Nutria feed on vegetation within hours of birth.

#### 4. They spread disease

Nutria can spread wildlife diseases such as avian cholera (*Pasteurella multocida*), which can be fatal to local bird species. If approached, nutria can bite humans, potentially causing infection.



### **What will happen if nothing is done to control nutria in greenway and sensitive lands?**

The City of Vancouver is making a significant effort to restore the natural habitat by replanting trees and shrubs in the Burnt Bridge Creek Greenway. If not controlled, nutria will destroy plantings.

Unchecked, they directly contribute to loss of habitat for native fish and wildlife, loss of biodiversity and the decrease of water quality. Efforts to reintroduce salmon and steelhead to Burnt Bridge Creek will be hindered if nutria are not eradicated.

Nutria damage to the creek bank increases the width to depth ratio, which makes the creek wider and shallower. This raises water temperatures and decreases oxygen levels making the creek uninhabitable to salmon and trout and lethal to juvenile fish. Nutria destroy salmon habitat.

When nutria dig up native plants, other invasive species listed by the Washington State Noxious Weed Control Board, such as reed canarygrass, are able to gain a stronger hold in the ecosystem.



### **How does the City of Vancouver plan to control the nutria problem?**

Nutria within the Burnt Bridge Creek Greenway and sensitive lands will be live trapped and removed by a U.S. Department of Agriculture Biologist and Damage Control Specialist.

Animals must be removed from non-lethal control devices within 24 hours of capture. These devices are to be located away from trails and areas where access by the general public would be considered high. For example, one removal area is within the Burnt Bridge Creek Greenway.

The live traps being used are specially designed to capture nutria and no other animals. Please be assured, however, if an untended, stray pet somehow manages to get into one of these live traps, it will be taken to the Humane Society. As a rule, no pets should be allowed unleashed and untended in greenways or sensitive lands where they could encounter predators and wildlife.

### **You can help!**

Please do NOT feed ducks, geese, nutria or other wildlife! It attracts non-native species, such as nutria and rats. It degrades the water quality.

### **In other communities—**

#### **How have other communities and states dealt with nutria?**

Due to the damage that nutria are capable of inflicting on the environment, much research has gone into methods of controlling this pest. Other communities and countries have successfully controlled nutria with live removal, including the United Kingdom, which has fully eradicated nutria.

#### **Sources of information**

Information reproduced with permission.

#### ***Nutria***

The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries  
[www.nutria.com](http://www.nutria.com)

#### ***Nutria Fact Sheet***

Friends of Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge  
[www.friendsofblackwater.org](http://www.friendsofblackwater.org)

#### ***Nutria in the NW***

Portland State University  
[www.cse.pdx.edu/wetlands/nwnutria.dir/nnw.htm](http://www.cse.pdx.edu/wetlands/nwnutria.dir/nnw.htm)

### **Greenway & Sensitive Lands Information**

For more information, please contact Mike Hale or Tim Esary, Greenway/Sensitive Lands Team, City of Vancouver, 696-8177.