

## Nutria Control at Capitol Lake: Frequently Asked Questions

The Washington Department of Enterprise Services will use lethal means to control nutria, an invasive rodent, at Capitol Lake. Here are some basic facts about the animal and why they are a problem.

### What are nutria?

[Nutria](#) (*Myocastor coypus*) are semi-aquatic rodents native to South America. Adult nutria are about two feet long, dark brown in color, have large orange teeth and white whiskers. They are often mistaken for beaver, especially when swimming, but have a thin tail. Nutria are found in farm ponds, freshwater impoundments, rivers, and fresh and brackish marshes in nearly 20 states.



### Why are they a problem?

The rodent can cause a number of problems including:

- Stripping lake shores, wetlands and riverbanks of vegetation due to their voracious appetite. This causes soil erosion, which can harm fish and other aquatic species.
- Constructing large burrows in the banks of rivers, sloughs and ponds which can weaken stream banks, roadbeds and other infrastructure.
- Breeding year-round. Nutria can have up to three litters per year and can quickly displace native wildlife. Nutria numbers can increase to the point where an area is denuded of vegetation, eliminating food and cover used by other wildlife.
- Carrying a variety of parasites and pathogens.
- Becoming aggressive biters and scratchers when cornered or captured. Nutria can seriously injure pets and humans.

### How did they get into Capitol Lake?

It isn't known how or when nutria got into Capitol Lake. The animals were brought to Washington in the 1930s for use in the fur industry. Some animals escaped into the wild but others were intentionally released when fur farming was no longer profitable. Nutria are spreading rapidly throughout Western Washington.

### What is the state doing about the problem?

Enterprise Services has signed an agreement with the [U.S. Department of Agriculture's Wildlife Services Program](#) to control the rodent using lethal means. The control work will be done at night using a small-caliber firearm with a noise suppressor.

---

### **Why isn't the state trapping nutria instead of shooting them?**

Selective shooting is a more effective and humane method for controlling nutria than trapping. Body-gripping traps are effective but can capture other non-targeted animals – including native species. Under [state law](#), nutria are classified as a Prohibited Aquatic Animal Species and all live-trapped animals must be euthanized. Traps can be tampered with, posing a public safety risk.

### **Is it safe to use guns at Capitol Lake?**

Wildlife Services employees are certified in firearms safety and are experienced in safe and effective use of firearms in safety-sensitive locations such as Capitol Lake. They will shoot the animals at night and only when a safe backdrop is presented. Animals may be taken either in the water or grazing on the banks. Federal animal control experts will not take any unsafe shots.

### **Are they allowed to use firearms within the city limits?**

The city of Olympia, like most municipalities, does have regulations prohibiting the use of firearms within city limits. An exemption for law enforcement will allow for Wildlife Services' operations.

### **How many nights will it take to get rid of the pest?**

It depends on how many animals are found. Earlier this year, Wildlife Services officials conducted day and nighttime nutria surveys around Capitol Lake. About a dozen animals were spotted but Wildlife Services says only about a third of any nutria population is typically seen during a survey. The pest control work could take a few days or several weeks. On-going surveys will monitor the population and determine what is needed to control the pests.

### **Once a nutria is shot, how will Wildlife Services remove the carcass?**

Wildlife Services employees will only shoot animals in the water that are close enough to be easily retrieved. The carcasses will be placed in heavy-duty bags and properly disposed.

### **Isn't Capitol Lake closed to boating? Why is Wildlife Services allowed to use a boat on the lake?**

Capitol Lake is closed to boating to prevent the accidental spread of New Zealand mudsnails, another invasive species found in the water body. Wildlife Services employees will clean their boat prior to moving it to any other location using Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife mudsnail decontamination procedures.

### **How much will this cost?**

Enterprise Services has budgeted a total of \$5,000 for the current pest control effort, although the actual cost is dependent on the size of the nutria infestation and control time needed.

### **For more information**

Jim Erskine, DES Communications  
(360) 407-9212, [jim.erskine@des.wa.gov](mailto:jim.erskine@des.wa.gov)