

University under fire for killing beavers

Rodents felled trees at Waterloo school; flooding feared next

Mirella Christou, The Ottawa Citizen Published: Saturday, November 18, 2006

The University of Waterloo stirred up a controversy this week after it trapped and killed four busy beavers after trees began to fall on campus grounds.

The beavers were drowned in underwater traps set up in Laurel Creek, which runs through the university's campus. The traps were removed yesterday because "all the beavers have been caught," according to Martin Van Nierop, a spokesman for the university.

He cited the falling trees and the potential for creek waters to rise as the reason to rid the grounds of the buck-tooth animals.

"We saw there was a severe problem, with a safety issue attached," said Mr. Van Nierop. "The issue was of flooding the area. (The creek) is right beside the student villages. Flooding could have occurred through the whole complex."

Beavers on campus became a problem two months ago when they began gnawing down large aspen trees and a very big heritage apple tree near student walkways.

The university recently hired an experienced trapper who is licensed by the Ministry of Natural Resources to put out traps that Mr. Van Nierop described as "humane," and which result in "an almost instantaneous death."

Carole Damms, a wildlife rehabilitator licensed by the Ministry of Natural Resources, has been watching the situation closely and disapproved of the traps.

"It's both a symbolic and animal rights issue," she said. "The traps were not humane because it takes nearly 15 minutes for the beaver to drown."

The original plan that the university devised was to trap the animals alive and relocate them. But that plan was dismissed after other concerns were raised, said Mr. Van Nierop.

"All the experts in the field ... say it's very difficult and very cruel to relocate them. They don't do it without suffering. There is no habitat for the beavers this time of year and many of them end up starving," he said.

The Kitchener-Waterloo Humane Society said it received calls from people who opposed the beaver trappings. "We can't stop something that is not illegal," said Elizabeth Bonkink of the Humane Society.

The humane society was satisfied that the trapper did the job legally, and that the university was within its legal right to remove the animals.

Art Timmerman of the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources affirmed that the university had not broken any rules in dealing with the rodents.

"The landowners of the university can deal with nuisance of animals if they feel the animals are damaging their property," said Mr. Timmerman.