



July 2023

Nutria Population Control at Smith and Bybee Wetlands Natural Area

Removing invasive nutria is necessary to reduce their negative impacts to Smith and Bybee's ecosystem.

Metro and its partners are continuing their work to control the nutria population at Smith and Bybee Wetlands Natural Area. This work will be conducted July through October of 2023, normally between sunset and sunrise when the natural area is closed to the public. Signage will be posted to alert visitors to avoid areas where the activity is taking place. This is part of ongoing population control at Smith and Bybee.

What are nutria?

Nutria are rodents native to South America. They are invasive in North America and harm natural areas in several ways. Nutria over-consume native wetland plants and compete with native wildlife for habitat and food. Nutria burrow on the banks of rivers, sloughs and ponds, which erodes the banks and causes rocks and dirt to fall into the water. At Smith and Bybee this causes water channels to not function as they should, and the water becomes stagnant. The stagnant water creates the perfect home for avian botulism, a toxin that is deadly to ducks, geese and other wading birds that migrate through these wetlands. Avian botulism has struck Smith and Bybee many times in the past, and thousands of birds have died at the natural area in a single outbreak.

Why does their population need control?

Because nutria at Smith and Bybee are not in their native habitat, they don't have natural checks and balances to keep their population at reasonable levels. Nutria can breed three times a year, producing three to four offspring each time. Because of this, a destructively high number of these animals are living at Smith and Bybee. Metro has conducted nutria control work as needed since 2012, most recently in 2019, but the population has grown again to concerning levels.

What method will be used?

Metro considered a number of population control methods and chose one that would offer the most humane and effective method of euthanasia. Over the years, biologists have determined that shooting nutria is a method which quickly ends their lives with the least amount of stress to the animal. A USDA Wildlife Services biologist who is highly skilled in this work will shoot the nutria in the natural area during the night, taking care to avoid harming other animals. Recovering the dead nutria will be the goal, but if an animal does consume a nutria, the biologist uses required non-lead ammunition to avoid lead poisoning. They may also use a sound suppressor to avoid excessive noise.