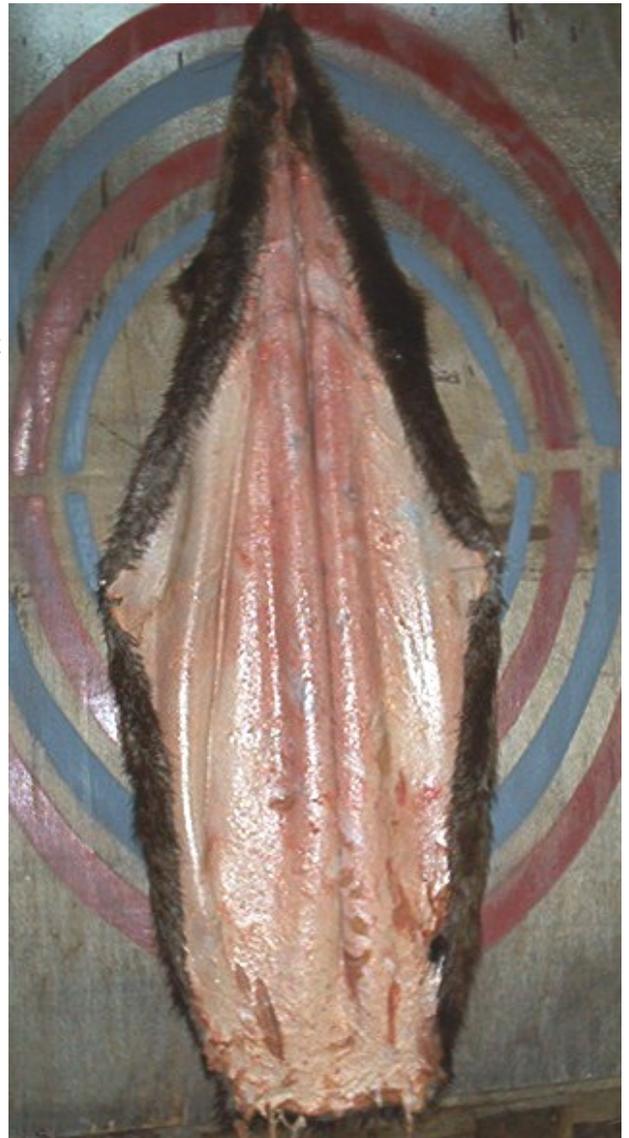


Fur handling tips – beaver stretching

Properly stretching beaver is a time consuming thing, but it's the fun part to me, almost like art! First thing you need is a board. Three quarter inch plywood is ideal, you can use thinner, especially if you want to nail them out laid flat on a table, but my back won't let me bend over like that for very long. One of these days I'm going to design a good frame for holding the stretching board, for now I have a cobbled up support made of a pallet and some 2 X 4's, not pretty, but it works. The edge of the board rests on the edge of the pallet, about waist high and maybe ten inches from the wall. A couple screws down in the pallet keep the bottom from sliding out off the pallet, and the top of the board just leans against the wall. If you use this method with something thinner than three quarter inch, it will bounce real bad when you try to nail it unless you put something behind it for support, then you're limited to only putting a beaver on one side. When you put lines on your board, make sure the pattern you use is close. I made boards last year with a pattern that I think is the same as Fur Harvesters. It's a nice pattern, but I found out that the amount added for "built in shrink" was a little ridiculous, and cost me money on sizes. Example, I stretched two beaver on what was supposed to be the 65" line, one was looser than I really wanted because I didn't think it would make the 70" line, the other I stretched fairly tight, tighter than I really wanted but it was close enough I couldn't see selling it in with the 60" beaver. Turns out those beaver are now both 68 1/2"! Same scenario with a few others also. I re-worked the pattern and made new boards that are a little closer. The only other things you need are a plain claw hammer and nails. I've played with a few different kinds of nails, and a seven penny common seems to work about the best for me. The seven penny is long enough to handle easily, and the common style is a little heavier and holds up pretty good.

Let's start stretching. If you didn't split the front of the nose to the nostril holes when you skinned, go ahead and split it now, it will nail out much easier. Put one nail in right below the nostrils. Hold the beaver up on the board with the nail and go up until you find a line where the tail end of the skin is hanging about two lines below the corresponding line on the bottom of the board on average to small size beaver, on big beaver you'll just have to eye the distance and go about three sizes down. Now, with the skin hanging, go a little more than the distance below center as what is hanging down below the corresponding line on the bottom of the board. Lightly start a nail on each side at this distance.

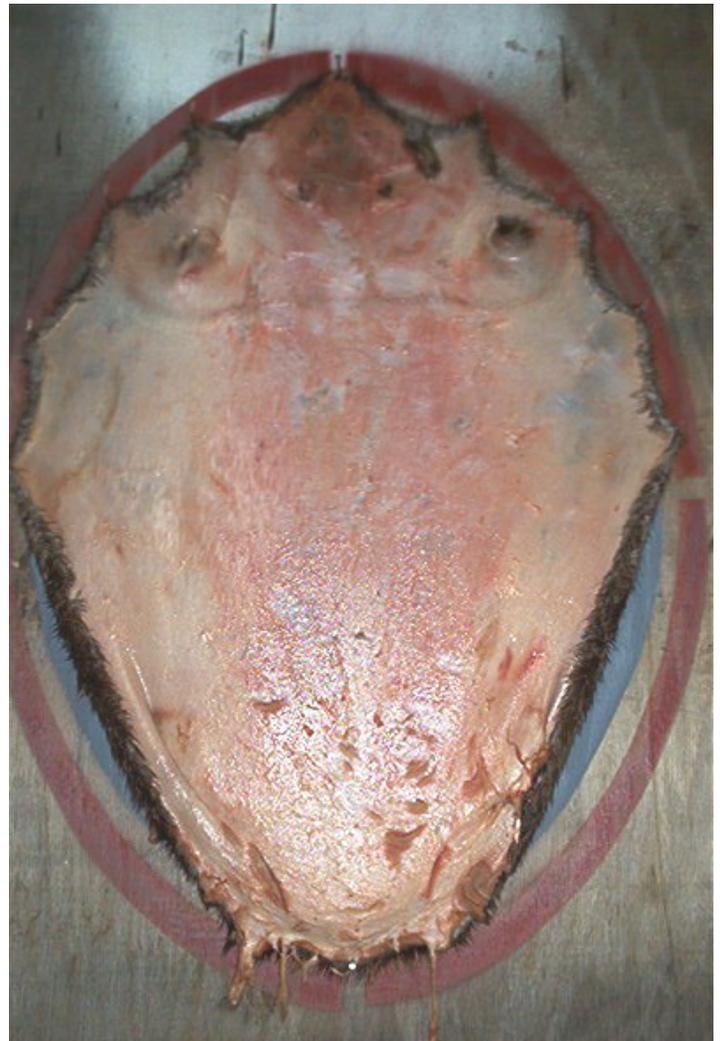




Now pull each nail and bring the skin up to the corresponding line at each side. This should bring the bottom edge of the skin just about to the corresponding line on the bottom of the board. If it looks good so far, tack one more nail in about even with each front leg hole. If it seems just a little tight, pull your side nails and move each one up about two inches. Beaver are much bigger in the hips than they are on the shoulder, but they want us to put them up symmetrical, so you need to give a little toward the shoulders, or you'll over stretch them while the hips are loose.

If the skin between the nails on the upper part of the beaver feels a little snug (the weight of the skin will add to this) but they will pull to the lines fairly easily, you should be good to go on this size. Go ahead and put one nail in at the base of the tail, then split the difference in the nails on the upper part. If it still feels like it will reach on the upper part you're ready to start nailing, if it seems too tight now, well, you don't really have that many nails you need to pull yet to downsize!

If you're ready to go, split the difference on the bottom, and then split each one again, this will give you three nails above and below center on each side. You can see in the picture that I pulled the first two side nails and moved them up on this one.



Now turn the board a quarter turn, so the beaver is sideways with the head to one side or the other. This brings it down so you don't need to reach as high to nail and takes the weight off that's trying to pull the skin down toward the hips. Start at the nose and split the difference on all the nails to the top center, this will pull more of the fur forward to thicken up the weak area behind the neck. You should be just about on your line now, so you can just start at the nose and fill in to the top center.

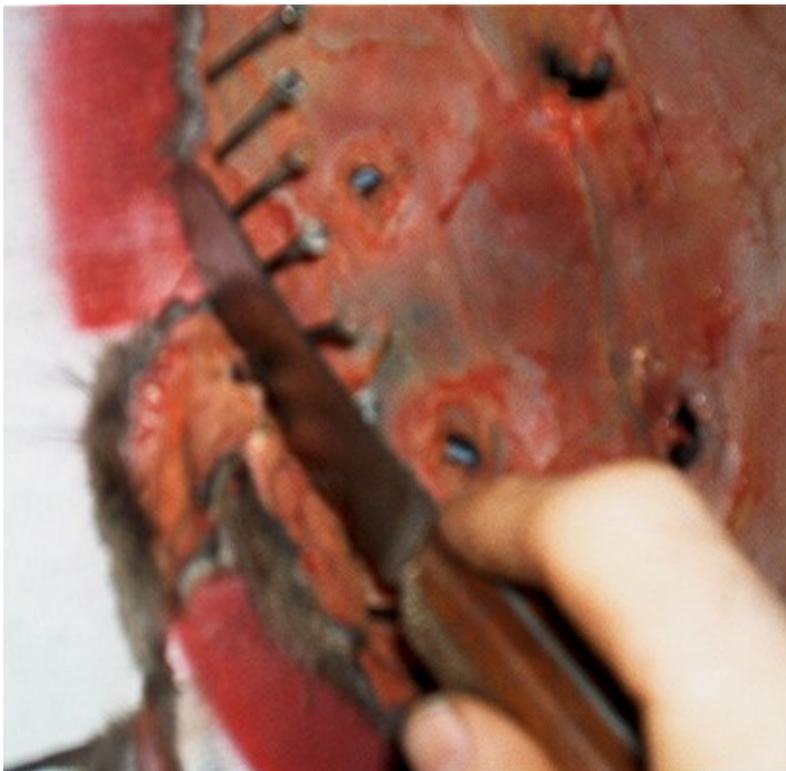


You lifted a lot of the fur up now, so go ahead and split the difference on the lower half of the front of the beaver to keep it from being pulled back toward the hips, then go back up top and finish nailing on around to the center of the tail. Turn the board so the top edge is down, start from the nose and continue on around to the tail just like you did on the first side.



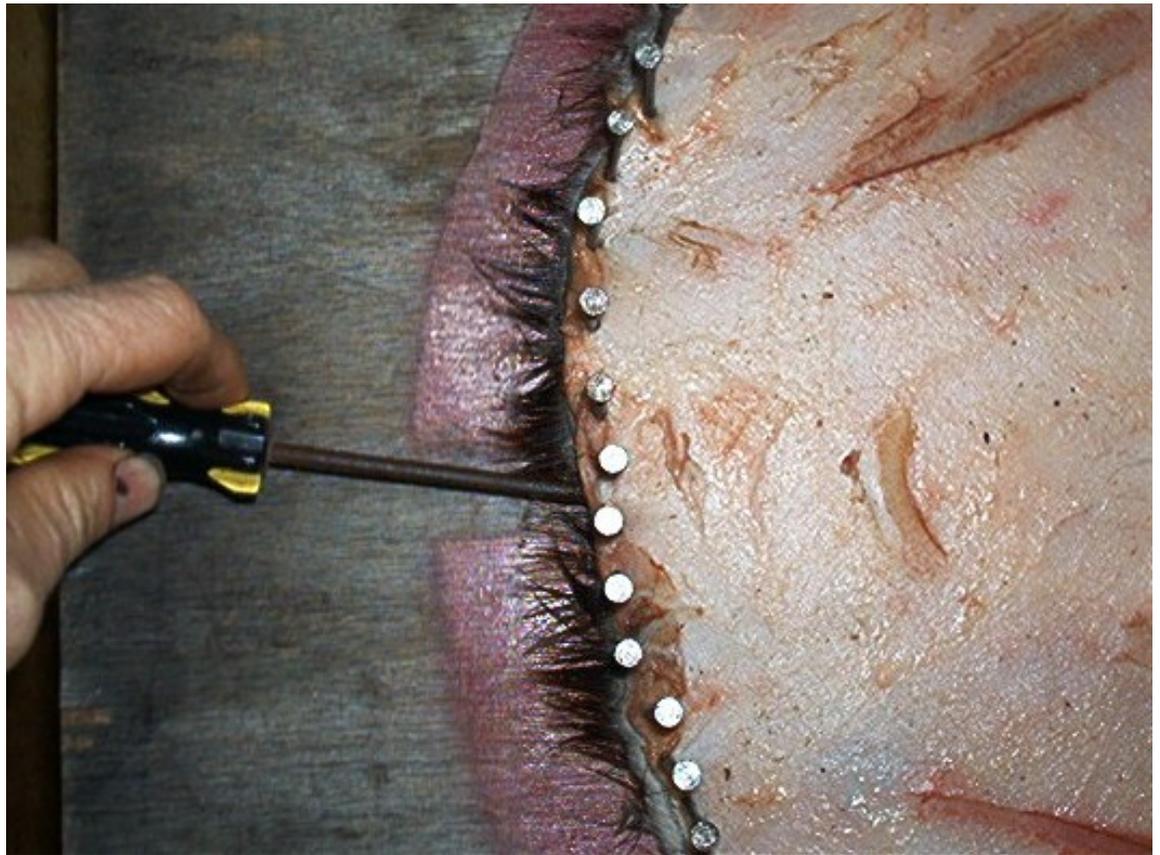
After the edges are nailed all the way around you need to trim the whiskers, lower jaw, tags and corners at tail, and leg holes. The whiskers and nose are of no value, and if you don't take the time to flesh them out real well, it's a place that will tend to rot before it dries.

Trimming the leg hole will get rid of the fat that didn't want to scrape off, and will also make it so you don't have so much excess skin that it folds over itself and prohibits drying.



I put five nails in each back leg and three in the front. Put two nails in the outside of the back leg hole and bring them toward the center so there a little snug, then use three from the inside of the leg hole and just take them out far enough to close the hole. Same thing on the front, one outside, two inside.

After everything is tacked, go around the edge and slide a screwdriver between the nails and work the skin up them so it's off the board a quarter inch or so.



Now just lean the board up against a wall, table etc. for the beaver to dry with the head down. You should have just a little slack in the skin and gravity will pull it up toward the shoulder area, if you look close you should be able to see where it's bunched up just a little at the front leg holes, this will flatten out as it dries.

I hope this has helped some people a little bit with the toughest fur we have to handle.