

# BEST PRACTICES



## Beavers in the Urban Landscape Part 1

### Your Friendly Neighborhood Beaver

Weighing up to 50 pounds, the North American Beaver (*Castor canadensis*) is America's largest rodent. They are cousins of mice and squirrels; there is nothing on earth that resembles them. They have a lifespan of 10–20 years and strictly eat bark, leaves, and the roots of a variety of plants. Their front paws are five fingered and nimble, like a raccoon. Their back feet are webbed, like a duck. Using their paddle shaped tails like a rudder on a boat, they can propel themselves swiftly through the water at speeds up to 5 miles per hour. Their teeth grow daily, strong enough to carve through wood like it's corn on the cob. Thick fur coats and a layer of fat keep them warm in the coldest of conditions. This is the profile of the North American Beaver, and the start of a four-part series presented in the 2023 Stream Team Newsletter.

### History of Beavers

Beavers are an integral part of our landscape, numbering between one hundred to two hundred million individuals throughout North America. Fossils found in Oregon show the presence of beavers dates back more than 7 million years. In the early 1800's, they were pushed to the brink of extinction for their meat, oils, and fur. In recent decades, changes have occurred to help protect beavers and restore beaver populations in an increasingly urbanized world. Salmon recovery efforts focused attention on stream health and riparian habitat, promoting restoration projects that favor beaver occupation. In 2000, there was a statewide ban of body gripping traps and a reduction in demand

### Did you know?

- Beavers modify their habitat by building water tight dams.
- Beavers slap their tails on the top of the water to signal danger.
- Beavers can stay underwater up to 8 minutes.
- Beavers teeth are orange from an iron rich enamel coating.
- Beavers are the largest rodent in North America.
- Beavers eat wood. Their teeth continuously grow and daily use helps wear them down.



for beaver fur. This has all led to beavers re-inhabiting streams, lakes and wetlands—the natural places they call home.

## The Benefit of Beavers

With beaver reintroduction comes a range of ecosystem benefits! Beavers create some of the most important habitat on earth, wetlands. Highlighted in our winter 2022 issue, wetlands are one of the most biodiverse super systems on the planet. In a short time, beavers can transform a dry landscape into a vibrant biodiverse ecosystem, making way for an abundance of insects, plants, and animals. They maintain water levels in order to create safe spaces to forage for food, build shelter, find a mate, and raise their young. These beaver associated wetlands allow water to slow down, recharging underground aquifers, reducing sediment and helping to filter contaminants. In return for beaver created habitat, we get clean drinking water, healthy streams for fish, amphibians, insects, mammals, and birds which leads to greater biodiversity right in our own backyard.

## Managing Beaver Population

What are the biggest obstacles to managing beavers in the urban landscape? Believe it or not, it's our own perceptions. Where beavers and landowners intersect, many landowners see them as a nuisance. After all, they eat their plants and trees, push the water level higher, turning dry land into wetlands, and even cause local roadways to flood during high rain events. The relationship between beaver and man has been tenuous at best; there are still misconceptions about beavers that get in the way of us embracing this potentially symbiotic relationship. Some believe beavers eat fish, or prevent fish from moving upstream, but this is just not true. Legend has it, beavers trained the salmon to leap. When it comes to flooding or managing vegetation, there are simple cost-effective methods to keep water flowing downstream. By implementing simple diversion tactics, we can detour beavers from taking certain trees and shrubs we choose to be left. Working with beavers has more benefits than working to remove them.

## Stay Tuned for More

This is just the beginning of our journey into the world of beavers and the role they play in the urban landscape. As 2023 unfolds, we will share more details regarding beaver behaviors in the wild. We will learn how they construct their dams and build their beaver lodge, feeding preferences, and highlight communities around South Puget Sound working to manage beavers in the urban landscape. In the meantime, as you visit your local wetlands, keep an eye and an ear out for the one true wetland engineer, our friendly neighborhood beaver.

## Get Out and Explore

Participate in the Black Lake Meadows Reserve Nature Sleuth treasure hunt and look for beaver evidence like gnaw marks on trees stumps! Learn more at [streamteam.info/nature-sleuths/black-lake-meadows-reserve](https://streamteam.info/nature-sleuths/black-lake-meadows-reserve).

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