

Beaver: Blessing or Curse?



Beaver (*Castor canadensis*) have historically been crucial to not only maintaining but creating wetlands by building dams across streams. They also played an important role in the exploration of the West as trappers fanned out across the continent in the 1700-1800s in search of valuable furs. Nearly trapped to extinction during the fur trade era, beavers have made a come-back in many areas, but they often come into conflict with humans. Beavers dam creeks and culverts, flood croplands and roads, and fell too many of the remaining trees in remnant riparian areas.

Along the Boise River you may have the opportunity to see a beaver's bank lodge (a pile of chewed tree limbs and driftwood covering tunnels into the banks). You may see the triangular head of a swimming beaver at the front of a long v-shaped wake, or hear it splash its tail as a warning signal before it dives out of sight. More likely, you will see signs of beavers on trees along the river—gnawed by their powerful jaws and huge front teeth to feast on the inner bark and tender branches. You can see many of these trees between the path and the river here in the park. You will also see trees wrapped in wire to prevent beavers from damaging them.

Do you think it's possible for us to share the remaining riparian areas with beaver? Can we conserve enough trees along the Boise River for beaver and other animals that depend on the riparian forests?



Along large, fast-moving rivers, beaver can't build dams to create ponds where they can build lodges. Along the Boise River they build bank lodges like the one above. Look for branches that have been chewed to a point like the one circled, and teeth marks on trees that have been gnawed on.

Both photos: Jane Rohling



A beaver's nostrils, eyes and ears are high on its head making it possible for it to swim with very little of its body visible above water.

Photo: National Park Service

