



Open Space and Natural Resources Division

We are Stewards of Natural Resources Essential to Aurora's Quality of Life

Natural Resource Bulletin

Urban Beavers and Beaver Management

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People often confuse beavers and muskrats. Both are semi-aquatic rodents, but beavers are larger and have a flat, paddle-shaped tail.

Muskrats have a narrow tail that undulates behind them as they swim.

Quick Beaver Facts:

North American Beaver

Castor canadensis

Weight: 33-77 lbs; 44 lbs. is a typical body mass

Average life span: 11 years

Diet: Beavers eat the sugary-salty layer of living tissue located just under the bark of living trees. Preferred food trees include cottonwood and willow. Beavers will also eat planted trees such as cherry, maple and birch.

Preferred habitat: Beaver dam site selection is based on local topography and food supply. Preferred dam sites will be in areas where the dam will flood a large flat area and where there are plenty of desirable woody plants for food in the vicinity. Streams that are more than two feet deep or have strong currents are not generally dammed.

Beavers often situate their dams where there are natural or human made constrictions in the stream flow. In addition to the primary dam and pond, other smaller dams up and downstream are often built to create smaller ponds.

A Surprising Urban Resident

Many people think of beavers as a creature of remote mountain streams, but beavers often find suitable habitat in urban stream corridors.

Recognizing Beaver Activity

If you see a large-bodied, brown rodent swimming across a pond or stream, don't assume it is a beaver. Smaller muskrats also live in urban ponds, canals and streams. The presence of dams, a lodge (lodges may be located along the bank or in the middle of the pond), downed trees and/or beaver chew marks on tree trunks or branches are all signs of beaver activity in an area.

Positive Effects of Beaver Activity

Beaver dams can have positive effects on water flow and water quality in urban stream corridors. Dams can increase wetland habitat which may improve water quality by mitigating sediment transport and trapping other potential pollutants.

Increased pond and wetland habitat can have positive effects on local wildlife including improved habitat for waterbirds, some species of fish, macroinvertebrates and amphibians. City wildlife species that benefit from beaver activity include herons, egrets, kingfishers, wood ducks, blue-winged teals, mallards, tiger salamanders, painted turtles, snapping turtles, chorus frogs, plains garter snakes and bullsnakes.

Because they increase wildlife habitat, beaver ponds improve wildlife watching opportunities for people, which is another major benefit of sharing our urban stream corridors with beavers.

Negative Effects of Beaver Activity

Depending on the location of the dam, beaver activity in urban areas has the potential to cause serious damage to human structures and create hazardous situations. Damming activities may weaken engineered structures and cause localized flooding. In an urban environment, these activities can create a public hazard by inundating roads, trails or basements. Beaver activity can also seriously damage or destroy valuable landscaping trees.

Mitigating Beaver Damage

Property owners and stream corridor managers can protect trees from beaver damage by installing beaver guards or painting tree bases with a mixture of beaver-resistant paint combined with play sand. Stormwater managers can install flow control devices that increase water flow through the dam and reduce water retention behind the dam to reduce flooding risks. In some cases, the threat to existing structures and/or existing landscaping are too great and the beaver will be removed from the area. Because of their positive impacts on the environment, many beavers are successfully relocated to private land owners' properties and streams.

