



Beaver facts

While evidence of beaver activity in an area are easy to spot, this beneficial mammal is rarely seen. Here are answers to some frequently asked questions.

Q: What benefits do beavers provide?

A: Beaver dams trap sediments and filter excess nutrients and pollution, which improves local water quality and eventually benefits the Chesapeake Bay. The ponds and wet meadows created by beaver dams provide habitat for plants to grow. The plants provide food and cover for many types of wildlife including mammals, birds, fish, reptiles, amphibians and macroinvertebrates.

Q: What are some basic facts about beaver biology?

A: Beavers are the largest rodent in North America and typically weigh between 20 and 60 pounds, but the largest beaver on record weighed 110 pounds. Beavers do not hibernate, instead, they store enough food underwater to sustain them through the long winter. Beavers can live over 20 years in captivity but usually live less than 10 years in the wild. In April or May, two to six kits will be born in the lodge, and the kits can swim at two to three weeks of age. Although the young are weaned at around two months of age, they remain with their parents until they are about two years old.

Q: Where do the beavers live?

A: Beavers typically live in a lodge built out of mud and sticks. The lodge, which can be 6 feet high and 20 feet wide, is used for breeding, raising young, sleeping and safety. Access to the lodge is via underwater tunnels, which lead to an inside chamber above the water. In Fairfax County, you'll also see beavers using "bank" lodges built into stream or river banks.

Q: Why do beavers create dams?

A: High water levels in streams and ponds enable beavers to move sticks and branches much larger than themselves and gain access to trees and shrubs for food. Beavers also use the deep water created by dams for safety. When out of the water, they are clumsy and susceptible to predation by coyotes and great horned owls. The largest beaver dam in Fairfax County can be found at Huntley Meadows Park.

Q: What can be done about problem beavers and problem dams?

A: Although beaver populations have rebounded throughout the eastern United States, they are still fairly rare. In some cases the behavior of beavers

can clash with human uses of land. Wrapping trees with wire mesh can reduce damage caused by beaver feeding. Beaver baffles are drainage pipes used to lower water levels in beaver ponds that have become too deep for human activities.

If not you, who? Small things.

◆ **Talk to people about the benefits of beavers.** When a beaver moves into a neighborhood, it is not always the most welcome neighbor. But the beaver dam will provide wildlife and plant habitat and filter water -- just a few of the many benefits of beavers.

If not you, who? Big things.

◆ **Recreate the benefits of a beaver pond in your own yard.** Trap water that spills off your house in a rain barrel. You can then use the water for your garden or planter boxes during a dry spell. Intercepting water from your house helps prevent water pollution by decreasing the amount of runoff in the storm sewers.

Beaver...

- ◆ are amphibious mammals.
- ◆ use their enormous tails as a rudder when swimming.
- ◆ slap their tail on the surface of the water to warn other beavers of danger.
- ◆ eat a variety of leaves, twigs, bark, plant rhizomes and plant tubers.

Text by Dave Lawlor



Care, Educate, Inspire

Stewardship is about working together to care for the environmental and cultural resources of Fairfax County. People become stewards for different reasons. They may want to help ensure clean water and air. They may wish to share something with their children. They may be inspired by spiritual beliefs. Whatever prompts our commitment, it is easy to take an active role in stewardship. It can be a small and simple thing, or it can be much bigger. Either way, it all adds up to a Fairfax County that looks to its past with pride and to its future with confidence.

You can learn more about Fairfax County Stewardship, the Board of Supervisor's 20-year environmental vision and the Fairfax County Park Authority at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/stewardship



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