

# Nature's Architects

## Beavers and People

Due to decreasing natural habitat, today beavers often live in close proximity to man. They can become a nuisance when they interfere with human land uses. These animals plug drains and use debris grids as dam bases because manmade structures make building easier. The result of their dam building is often flooded yards or roads.



Beavers also fell trees within the vicinity of their lodges for food and building material. They accomplish this work quickly. Willow and aspen are some of their favorite targets.

Methods of living with beavers include:

**Beaver Deceivers** – Drainpipes can be installed through beaver dams, allowing water to pass through the dam and continue downstream. The drain is under the water surface so beavers rarely find the source of the breach.

**Tree Protection** – Wrapping tree bases at least one yard in height with heavy mesh, sheet metal or several layers of chicken wire can stop beaver chewing. Repellents are also available that create an unpleasant smell or taste for the animals.

## Beavers in Nature

Like humans, beavers (*Castor canadensis*) shape the landscape to suit their needs. By constructing sturdy dams of sticks, leaves, and mud, beavers raise the water level around their lodge to form a pond. Quicker in the water than on land, beavers prefer the protection of the pond. They never stray far from its edge to feed.

Beavers prefer to dam streams in shallow valleys. Here much of the flooded area becomes wetlands. Beaver ponds range from an acre to 100 acres in size, depending on topography and the availability of food. Beavers inhabit and expand a pond area until its food supplies are gone, sometimes up to 10 years or more.

An estimated 2 million beavers once ranged across North America, damming streams and creating fertile areas for wildlife. Today their numbers have diminished significantly due to habitat loss and hunting.



## Beaver Pond Benefits

### Active Ponds

- Improve downstream water quality
- Provide water sources for agriculture and wildlife
- Create breeding habitat for amphibians and fish
- Produce feeding, brood rearing, and resting areas for waterfowl

### Abandoned Ponds

- Silt in and slowly return to their original forested state
- Create snags and fallen logs that provide food and shelter for wildlife
- Provide edges and forest openings that increase forest diversity

