

American beaver (*Castor canadensis*)



Taxonomy:

Family Castoridae. Also called Canadian beaver. About 24 subspecies have been named, including *Castor canadensis baileyi*, the regional subspecies.

Description:

Easily distinguished from other regional mammals by its size, and specializations for semi-aquatic life: large, webbed hind feet as well as a dorso-ventrally flattened tail.

Total length: 1-1.2 m; Tail: 230-325 mm; Weight: 16-30 kg.



Distribution:

Most of North America north of Mexico; absent from the high arctic and portions of the southwest and Great Basin. Common along many of the streams and rivers along the Wasatch Front.

Ecology and diet:

Beaver are highly specialized semi-aquatic mammals that are closely associated with riparian habitats. In areas with steep gradient streams, they construct dams and channels to maintain sufficient water depths for living space and to gain safe access to feeding areas.

The diet consists of leaves and inner bark of a

wide variety of trees and shrubs, although the preferred species in the west are aspen and willows. Although beaver activity often involves extreme habitat modification, these changes result in much greater diversity in riparian areas.

Life History:

Unlike most mammals, beaver are generally monogamous and form long-term pair bonds. Colonies consist of a mated pair and dependent young from 1 or more litters. Mating occurs in mid to late winter, and after a gestation of about 100 days, litters of 1-7 young are born in late spring or early summer. Young remain in the colony after weaning but disperse at maturity (1.5-2.5 years). Adults may live for 20 years.

References: Jenkins & Bushar 1979.