

Beavers on the Jordan River

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Castor Canadensis, or the Canadian beaver, is the largest rodent that inhabits North America. Native to this continent, beaver are distributed throughout all regions of Utah. Populations were rumored at 60-400 million before European settlement. Many Utah explores noted this beaver abundance throughout the state. However, populations dwindled as beaver pelt demand

increased. Although not typically found in the upper sonoran lifezone of the Great Basin desert, these aquatic mammals are found throughout the Jordan River corridor due to the abundance of food and lack of natural predators. Webbed feet, a stout body, and a broad paddle like tail assist in swimming. While graceful swimmers in the water, beavers can be extremely



clumsy on land. Their tails can be used as both a means for locomotion and safety. If a beaver feels threatened, they will often slap their tail against the water to warn both the predator and to alert fellow colony members. Beavers are typically monogamous with a partner and young, this is called the family group. Extended family members often form a loss knit group, a colony. Typically beavers, throughout North America, build dams for

shelter and protection against predators, as seen in the forested, alpine areas of the Wasatch Forest. However, beavers along the Jordan River build their shelter in the stream banks called burrows. These bank lodges are generally reserved for larger rivers or rivers prone to flooding, hence why these are built along the Jordan River. The entrances to these shelters are typically underwater to avoid predation and have a small breathing hole just above the water level. They may also build a lodge on top of the stream bank. Even though shelters are built into the bank on the Jordan, beavers still flood the area around their lodge in order to expand their available habitat and increase safe access to food.

These beaver-created, wetlands provide crucial habitat for a variety of fish, small mammals, big game, waterfowl, and other birds. These dams also slow the erosion of the riverbanks that has plagued the Jordan River,



as human encroachment has channelized and, therefore, sped up the river. Plants also benefit from these wetlands, especially native tree species, such as cottonwood, which requires flooding to germinate its seeds. These flood lands can also help filter out anthropogenic pollutants, as water is trapped in these wetland-like areas it is able to filter through the soil and recharge aquifers. They can also slow down the actual river filtering pollutants, recharging aquifers, and slowing down riverbank erosion.

Their diet consists of forbs, grasses, roots, and tubers, aspen, cottonwood, and willow. Many times beavers will fall trees using their sharp, buckteeth in order to more easily

access the rest of the branches. This proves to be both a problem and a solution for the Jordan River corridor. Beavers chop down invasive species that plagued the corridor, such as Russian Olive, which tolerates drought and thrives in almost any soil and, therefore, almost impossible to eradicate. However, beavers also attack native species, such as cottonwood and willow that are vital to the corridor ecosystem and the native species that depend on these trees for habitat and food. This can undermine restoration efforts along the Jordan River.



Beavers bring excellent beauty and watchable wildlife to the Jordan River corridor. They can also bring many beneficial ecosystem services that help ecosystems mitigate degradation, such as invasive species and harmful anthropogenic pollutants. Beavers can become a nuisance, however, when populations are not controlled or food availability dwindles. A management plan that helps mitigate the negative effects and enhances the positive effects of beavers is required to facilitate a symbiotic relationship between humans and beavers. Mitigation plans are already underway, for example wire rapping of native trees can help shy beavers away from these trees and focus attention on invasive species. Also, live trapping can transplant colonies of beaver to better suited beaver habitats when populations exceed the carrying capacity of an area.