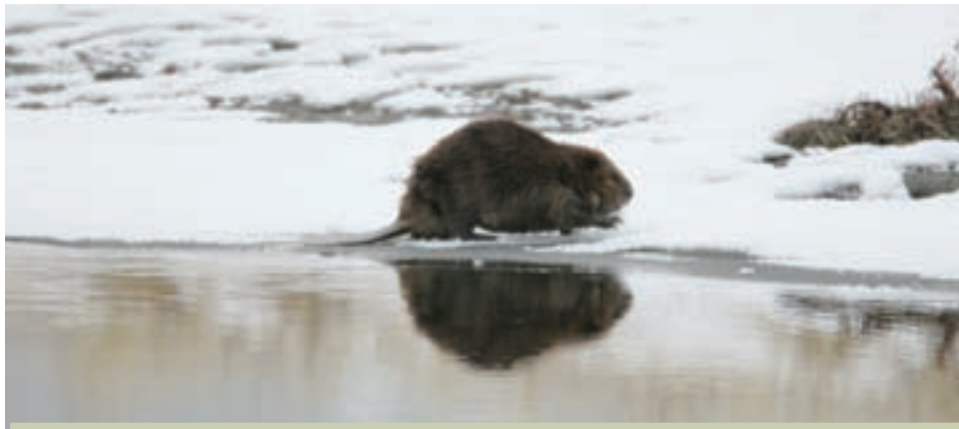


# 7a

## Beaver



As of January 2011 . . .

### Number in Yellowstone

Minimum estimate: 750 in 116 colonies

### Where to see

Beavers often have lodges in Willow Park (between Mammoth and Norris), Beaver Ponds (Mammoth area), Harlequin Lake (Madison area), and the Gallatin River along U.S. 191. In the backcountry, they often have lodges in the upper Yellowstone River (Thorofare region), Bechler River, and Slough Creek. They may be seen occasionally in the Lamar, Gardner, and Madison rivers.

### Behavior & Size

- Crepuscular: active in evening and morning
- If live on rivers, may build bank dens instead of lodges.
- One lodge may support 6–13 beavers that are usually related; this group is called a colony.
- 35–40 inches long, including tail.
- Weighs 30–60 pounds.
- Average life span: 5 years.

### Other Information

- Beavers are native to Yellowstone.
- Yellowstone's beavers escaped most of the trapping that occurred in the 1800s due to the region's inaccessibility.
- The most recent survey for beavers in Yellowstone was conducted in 2009.

Since 1979, park staff has periodically surveyed riparian habitat in Yellowstone to determine current presence and distribution of beaver (*Castor canadensis*). These surveys confirmed that beavers live throughout Yellowstone National Park but are concentrated in the southeast (Yellowstone River delta area), southwest (Bechler area), and northwest portions (Madison and Gallatin rivers) of the park. They are also making a comeback in the northern range due to new willow growth and because they were reintroduced nearby in the Gallatin National Forest. These areas are likely important habitat because of their waterways, meadows, and the presence of preferred foods such as willow, aspen, and cottonwood.

Beavers, however, are not restricted to areas that have their preferred foods. Essentially no aspen exist in most areas where beaver sign is most abundant, such as in the Bechler River. The same is true in other areas where beavers periodically live, such as Heart Lake, the lower Lamar River and Slough Creek area, Slide Lake, and the lower Gardner River. In these areas,

beavers use willows for construction and for food. Where their preferred plants are few or absent, beavers may cut conifer trees and feed on submerged vegetation such as pond lilies.

Beavers are famous as dam builders, and examples of their work can be seen from the roads in the park. An old dam is visible at Beaver Lake between Norris and Mammoth. Most dams are on small streams where the gradient is mild, and the current is relatively placid during much of the year. Colonies located on major rivers or in areas of frequent water level fluctuations, such as the Lamar River, den in holes in the riverbank.

Male and female beavers look alike—thick brown fur, paddle-shaped tail, weigh 30–60 pounds, and are 35 to 40 inches long, including tail. When hunched over their food, beaver can resemble round rocks.

Because beavers are most active in the early morning and late evening, visitors seldom see them. But these animals do not necessarily avoid areas of moderate to high levels of human use. Several occupied lodges in Yellowstone are close to popular backcountry trails and campsites. Every year, beavers are seen along main park roadways. The twilight habits of beavers seem to be enough to separate them from human use of the same area.

People who wait near known beaver activity areas may be rewarded with the sight of them swimming smoothly along or clamoring onto the bank to gnaw at trees and willows. But they may just as likely hear the sound of a startled or surprised beaver—the sharp sound of the beaver slapping its tail on the water before it submerges to seek safety.