



As the seasons transition, it's good to reflect...

We've experienced some high flows in our rivers and streams within the past month! Often, this results in an increase in observed beaver activity, but don't panic! A bit of biology and behavioral ecology will explain much of this, and should help alleviate potential concerns.

Though beavers are rodents, they don't breed like mice! Seeing one doesn't mean you have tens. Beavers reach reproductive maturity at two years of age, and can only produce two to four kits per year. These kits stay with the family and are dependent until two years of age, so family dynamics are important! If you do see beaver kits (a viable possibility in late spring and early summer), consider yourself lucky!

High flows bring a lot of woody debris and natural material downstream, including sticks chewed by beavers! Seeing beaver chews washed up at the high-water mark doesn't necessarily mean you have beaver on your property, since flows may have deposited those materials. Similarly, woody debris racked up in streams and rivers doesn't mean beavers are attempting to dam that system – in fact, beavers oftentimes have nothing to do with such accumulations!

Beavers are herbivores! If you're concerned about their fish intake, don't be. A beaver's diet is composed of trees' cambium and leaves, and herbaceous foods that include many grasses and forbs. In summer, a greater portion of a beaver's diet is comprised of abundant herbaceous vegetation, which is part of the reason less tree felling is observed. Lower flows during warmer months also reduce their need to fell trees for dam-building materials.

Beaver or muskrat? The two semi-aquatic rodent species often share habitat. In general, muskrats are much smaller, but beaver kits can be easily mistaken. The key differences are that beavers have wide, flat tails, whereas muskrats have skinny, more rat-like tails, and that beavers' ears tend to be more visible. When watching the two animals swimming, most of a muskrat's body is visible, while a beaver often will submerge its body aside from its head (though not always, as shown below). Only beavers build dams, but muskrats benefit from the ponded water, and munch on much of the aquatic vegetation which in turn helps make paths for the beavers.

Can you tell who's who in the images below?

Happy wetland watching! As always, should you have questions or concerns about beaver, we're here!

Beaver Solutions Hotline: (509) 289-2770



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