



Signs of Spring: Birdsong & Beaver Chews

Greetings, beaver folks!

The spring sun is busy melting snow from the peaks surrounding our watersheds and blooming the brilliantly green leaves on riparian Aspen, Maple, and Cottonwood trees. With the passing of another long winter, we at Methow Beaver Project are reflecting on our progress over the past few months and celebrating the season that brings increased activity of our beaver friends!

This newsletter features a beautiful short story from local land steward and conservationist, Gert Webster. Stay tuned for information about upcoming volunteer stewardship and naturalist opportunities and [donate below to support our spring human-beaver coexistence efforts!](#)

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What are Beavers up to in Spring?

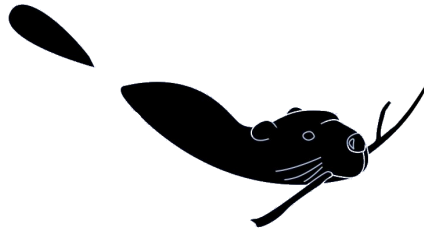


Beavers do not hibernate, but they are less active during the harsh North Central Washington winter and spend most of their time cozied up in their lodges and dens. Beavers lose the majority of their fat reserves by March and need to eat quite a bit to recover from the hard times.

With warmer temperatures, beaver activity increases. Juvenile beavers (2-3 years old) will explore surrounding areas and begin to disperse into new territories. Paired adults are busy preparing for new kits in May and June; their younger offspring (1-2 years old) will soon be big brothers and sisters.

There are many coexistence strategies private land owners and stewards can apply to manage increased beaver activity this time of year, such as tree protection and flow devices that protect culverts and control flooding. We are happy to explore solutions with you.

Visit methowbeaverproject.org or call (509)289-2770 for more info.



Chiliwist Beaver Family Update

Last September, we relocated a family of four beavers to private lands along Chiliwist Creek; you may remember them as Lil' Bee, Rainy, Pyro, and mother Gertrude. The Carlton Complex fire burned this part of the Okanogan in 2014, burning the homes of many animals in its path, including the home of Gert Webster and Ron Hull. For decades, these incredible stewards and their children have been restoring their land post-timber harvest, post-livestock impacts, and most recently, post-wildfire, with the help of Methow Beaver Project and beloved beavers.

We are working together with WA Department of Ecology, the Wildlife Conservation Society, and the Okanogan Land Trust to restore water and habitat to the lands in their care. In the summers of 2022 and 2023, MBP installed Beaver Dam Analogues in Chiliwist Creek below a series of historic beaver ponds on Gert and Ron's property. These BDA's have already collected several feet of sediment in some places as the structures slow water down during high flows and allow it to drop transported sediment out of the water column. We hope that this new beaver family relocated last Fall will take over as the resident ecosystem engineers soon.

Below is a beautiful short story written by our friend and mentor, Gert, recounting the tale of her land and the many species that call it home. Please enjoy her words of gratitude for this life and for the animal we hold dear: the mighty beaver.



A series of BDA's at Chiliwist Creek; the visible posts are the second layer (installed 2023), and the first layer (installed 2022) is now covered in 4ft of sediment.

Picture: MBP

"A Full House Again, At Last"

Short Story by Gert Webster

"Willows, aspen, water birch, alders, osiers, cattails. Song sparrows, willow fly catchers, red-winged blackbirds, nesting northern harriers, ruffed grouse, ducks, geese. Frogs. Black bears. White tailed and mule deer. Coyotes and wolves. Snowshoe hares. Dragon flies, bees, mosquitoes. So much life, absolutely teeming with life. Yet somehow a lonesome place for the past several years since the resident beavers vanished from the ponds here with a poof, out of sight and into memory. A tuft of fur and a pile of stomach contents in the snow told part of the story.

The autumn of 2023 was one of the loveliest in memory. The colors lasted without fading until my heart wanted to burst. Mellow temperatures and fragrant air made every day lush. In September I received the news from dear friends at the Methow Beaver Project that a family of beavers needed a relocation and the ponds I love could be their new home!!! Preparations were

made for their arrival. Stacks of willows and aspens were tossed into the three ponds to provide easily accessed grub for the short term while they explored their new home and discovered safe places to be and to make a start on a winter food stash. Trail cameras were placed to help archive their adaptation to this place. And then gently, quietly, almost reverently, they were transported and released. A mixture of joy, excitement, hope, terror and dread of failure shook me. Wildlife re-locations are fraught with problems. For this little beaver family of four, the only options were re-location and a chance to start fresh or death and I ached for them to survive and thrive. We celebrated beavers in the ponds again with fresh apple cider and a splash of something stronger. Huzzah!!

Resisting the urge to walk to the ponds daily, I tried to give the new residents a bit of privacy to settle in. We went out with a re-supply of willows and aspen after a week or so and were elated to see that all the food placed earlier was gone; eaten, buried at the bottom of the ponds, or pulled into the dens chosen by the beavers. The water was roiled and muddy. A scent mound had been placed prominently on a partially submerged log. Things were happening! But, oh horrors! The trail camera showed a black bear visiting every night. While poking around in the weeks following, I found what was left of a beaver hind quarter with an attached webbed foot lying along one of the wide paths the hungry bear had made. Death for one, after all, and yet life for another. A final feast before entering hibernation. In an early skiff of snow, I followed the bear's tracks to a canyon and over a ridge. Happy napping, bruin.

Through the mild winter, ice crystals around the vent hole in a bank den and recent chews of osier and birch right next to the ponds were happy signs of a cozy, well fed crew. During the cold snap in January the ponds froze except at the inlet and where the water flowed over each of the three dams. Deer crossed the ice to drink at the open water and the beavers sheltered inside. Brrr! And then one banner day in February, the melting pond ice was crossed by many beaver tracks that bee lined over a trail to chewed aspens and willows!! I savored the jubilation of that beacon of progress for many days...well, I guess I'm still feeling the delight!"



*Chiliwist
Creek's
"Gertudeness"
beaver family
tracks leading
back to one of
their ponds,
with a
peekaboo view
of their bank*

lodge in the background.

Picture: Gert Webster.

"This evening I walked out to look at and listen to everything going on after an unusually warm March day. I could see the brushy growth around the ponds over across the creek; osiers brightening and willows shining as their sap rises, catkins hanging from the aspen tips. Frogs,

lots of frogs, were speaking of their desire and lust, robins whinnied, a red winged blackbird sang his final song of the day, and a coyote yipped on a near hillside. The beavers are there, giving all of us life through water held and stored, making this place feel a little wilder and much more vibrant.

For this gift of life, I send loving thanks to the people of the Methow Beaver Project. I could list every positive adjective in the English language and still come up short in describing the astonishing brilliance of what they do and how they get it done. Heroes, every one of them.

Onward, my dears."



Alexa and Gert together at the Chiliwist Creek beaver ponds.

Picture: Julie Vanderwal



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Methow Beaver Project, a program of Methow Salmon Recovery Foundation

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MBP PO Box 755 Twisp, WA 98856

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