

Mr. Beaver

By Earl Ingebright

We found that being stewards of 100 acres of forestland near Granite Falls, Washington brings a lot of responsibility to more or

less balance the pleasures of forest and stream. We share this land with native creatures, large and small, which do not always agree with our ideas of stewardship. Most destructive from our apparently biased point of view, are the beavers. In some respects, they have all the earmarks of terrorists; in others they show a creative streak bordering on the artistic.



A creek runs through the property we have "owned" since 1959. The beavers have created ponds - large and small - that they maintain in a casual sort of way. Although they are reputed to be fine, natural engineers, the opposite comes closer to the truth. Perhaps other beavers have not had the opportunity to attend beaver college, nor do they have access to the resources of the Washington State University Extension Service. They build dams in the wrong places, and build them so high that the backed up water floods our Douglas fir plantation. They must also have a lazy streak, as they will plug a culvert and make the roadway a dam, with Niagara Falls flowing over it!

Until a couple of years ago we seldom actually saw a beaver. However, we knew they were active in our creek and ponds from observing the peeled sticks and fresh mud on the dams. In order to keep the water level at an acceptable height, I dug ditches at intervals along the face of the dams, only to find that the next morning the ditches would be filled with sticks and mud. This went by, day after day, with neither of us willing to give in.

One day I was laboriously cleaning out the ditches at a large dam when I had the uncomfortable feeling that someone, or something was watching me. I glanced up and saw a monstrous beaver, at least four feet long, glaring at me from the safe distance of twenty feet away in the pond. "Mr. Beaver" as he soon came to be known, swam in circles and continued to show his displeasure with my efforts to lower the pond level. After five minutes or so of his glaring, I left the pond to get my wife. With some disbelief of my story, my wife and I returned to the pond. Mr. Beaver was gone, but with a few whistles and calling "Mr. Beaver", he came up to the dam from the far end of the pond and resumed his glaring.

The next day my cousin David and his wife came up from California to spend a few days with us. I told them the story of "Mr. Beaver", and his willingness to confront me in the middle of the day. David and I returned to the pond, and again I whistled and called "Mr. Beaver". He swam right up to the dam, dove, and came back up right in front of me. He then slapped his tail and splashed me with water.