

Making new wetlands with help from beavers

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In this Sept. 12, 2014, photo, a young beaver explores an old beaver lodge near Ellensburg, Washington, after its family was relocated by a team from the Mid-Columbia Fisheries Enhancement Group. Photo: AP Photo/Manuel Valdes

LOS GATOS, Calif. — Three years of drought have dried up California's rivers and streams. But one animal might help the water flow again. Beavers may come to the rescue.

"This state has lost more of its wetlands than all other states," said Rick Lanman. He is a beaver expert in California. Wetlands are watery land areas. Often, they are near rivers or other bodies of water. Swamps are one kind of wetland. "Beavers can rebuild those wetlands," Lanman said.

Trees, Rocks And Mud

California might bring beavers to dry areas to build dams. To start a dam, beavers drag a tree across a stream. They carry rocks and mud with their paws. They use their big front teeth to carry branches. The dams block off water, so it does not flow away.

Beaver dams help nature in ways that humans cannot easily copy. They change land so that it soaks up water. It is almost like a sponge. This helps makes better soil so more plants can grow. The dams slow down the flow of water.

Beaver dams can help streams flow during the summer. Otherwise, the streams could dry up in the heat.

Beavers Are Helpers

Michael M. Pollock is with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. It is part of the government. Scientists are thinking about using beavers to bring back wetlands, he said.

Beaver ponds are good for the environment, Pollock said. "They also create a lot of wetland that provides a lot of food for fish."

Beaver dams make deep pools. The water in the beaver pools is warmer at the top and cooler at the bottom. Warmer water can hurt fish. "Fish are able to find the temperature that is ideal for them," Pollock said.

Beavers Can Also Be Troublemakers

This is not the first time people are using beavers to help nature. Beavers once lived all over California. More than 100 years ago, they were nearly wiped out. Fur traders killed them for their beautiful fur. From the 1920s to 1940s, California used beavers to prevent river banks from wearing away. Beaver dams provide more water to bushes on the sides of rivers. In turn, the bushes keep river banks from crumbling. By 1950, there were 20,000 beavers in California. No one knows how many beavers live in California now.

Beavers can improve damaged streams more cheaply than humans. You cannot just move in a family of beavers, though. Beavers can cause serious damage. That is why California allows beaver hunting. They can also be moved or killed if they cause trouble. Beavers can damage underground pipes. They can also harm farmland. Beaver dams may flood homes.

The California Fish and Wildlife Department is trying out man-made dams. They will be like beaver dams. If they work, the beavers can stay where they are. The man-made dams will also help avoid the damage beavers can cause.

Quiz

- 1 Select the sentence from the article that shows how beavers help store water in the soil.
 - (A) "Beavers can rebuild those wetlands," Lanman said.
 - (B) They change land so that it soaks up water.
 - (C) "They also create a lot of wetland that provides a lot of food for fish."
 - (D) Beaver dams make deep pools.

- 2 Read the section "Beavers Are Helpers." What would be another good title for this section?
 - (A) "Fish Live In Cold Water"
 - (B) "Fish Is Beaver Food"
 - (C) "Benefits Of Beaver Pools"
 - (D) "Scientists Will Recreate Wetlands"

- 3 What is the summary of paragraph 3 of the article?
 - (A) Wetlands are wet areas that exist near water bodies such as rivers.
 - (B) Beavers can rebuild the wetlands that once existed in California.
 - (C) Beavers live in swamps which are a type of wetlands.
 - (D) California had more wetlands than other states.

- 4 According to the article, which of the following is FALSE?
 - (A) Beavers damage crops and farms.
 - (B) Beavers can damage underground pipes.
 - (C) Beavers make the soil infertile.
 - (D) Beaver dams can cause floods.