

# The Beaver, Foremost Wildlife Citizen

By WILLIAM L. FINLEY

(EDITORIAL NOTE: *The following discussion concerns one of North America's most interesting mammals, interesting not alone because of the fact that the search for the beaver's valuable fur led to revealing and historically important explorations, but likewise interesting because of its own extraordinary habits and abilities. The beaver, thanks to the efforts of the Department of Conservation, is increasing the population of its colonies in Louisiana.*)

In the West where forests, streams and snow-clad mountains lie just beyond the centers of population and where primitive areas are not all destroyed, interest is growing stronger toward the public use of the out-of-doors for health and happiness. Commercialism is still driving to make money by rapid exploitation. Can we check the quick private profits on natural resources that have been running the people's account into the red?

Who is to watch the public's interest in our wildlife resources when they are wasted by greed and carelessness? The average citizen hasn't the time, and what is everybody's business is nobody's business. Education must be used as the key to conservation. The children of today must straighten out the tangles of tomorrow.

To the promoter and exploiter, all our wildlife resources have had but one use, killing for profits of some kind. The conservation history of America reveals many examples of killing the goose that laid the golden egg, the most striking of which is the trappers' campaign against the humble beaver to get quick profits on his hide. It is very much like making a stew out of a productive hen or a roast out of a fine milk cow. Nature's engineer, the

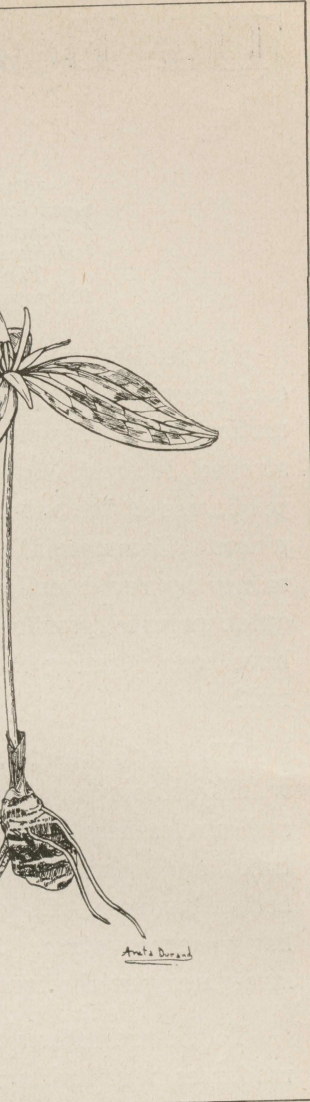
beaver, has a good warm coat, but his greatest service has been in creating our earliest industry of conserving soil and water. In the West he has proved to be the most valuable wild animal in existence and one that built up a vast amount of wealth.

As a conserver of soil and water the busy beaver is more logical and toils with a more persistent purpose than man in building dams. Both have the same incentive, to store up water. A beaver dams a stream to create a moat around his house for protection. Man dams a stream to create a reservoir for irrigation and power. In this day and age when western people are so conscious of dams the beaver ought to be crowned as our wildlife citizen number one, because in arid areas he builds reservoirs to save water without cost, while man is building enormous dams to store up water, but saddling future generations with gigantic debts.

A long time ago when the great mountain ranges were lifted up from the Atlantic to the Pacific, the rains came and the floods swept down the gullies and canyons, washing the rich top soil to the sea. Then the beavers moved in, building dams along all the little streams, stopping the rush



Louisiana Beaver (*Castor canadensis carolinensis* Rhodes). Photographed from a mounted specimen in the Louisiana State Museum.



**TRILLIUM**  
*sessile* L.

Liliaceae

Winter awake the trillium to a green leaves come peeping through the ground. A clump of these flowers is inviting only to the eye. A stem, technically called a rhizome, often does not move. The leaves manufacture starch to be used for rapid growth. When the leaves are removed, the stem may not grow. The danger of extermination have stems in leaves are borne on the top of the stem from four to eight inches high. The dark red, ill-scented flower opens in April. The seeds are not narrowed into claws of a uniform color. *Trillium lutescens* differs in having the petals sometimes differently colored. It had extreme difficulty in trying to collect it. The thing collected has been apparently under observation had the newly collected and as the flowers aged the petals faded. Occasional specimens have yellow bases to the petals, but the rest are nearly one-half natural size.



A dam constructed by the Louisiana Beaver on the Amite River in St. Helena Parish.

of waters, and the soil settled to the bottom. Ponds filled up with silt, turning into meadows; more ponds and more soil developed from little to big valleys, getting the whole topography of the country ready for man's arrival and benefit. The water table was built up from its sources. Forests were fostered and conserved moisture in the sponge-like soil. Innumerable ponds and lakes made homes for fish life, waterfowl and fur-bearing animals. Streams grew and fed rivers to irrigate the lower stretches of the land.

The proof today is clear that a beaver's value is in his work and not solely in his hide. The facts have been uncovered in thousands of areas in the West. Beavers were trapped out, ponds and lakes dried up, the water table lowered, and grass-covered valleys reverted to deserts. Soil erosion and dust storms followed which are the tragic pictures of today.

Let me give you an example. Two trappers took out 600 beaver pelts one winter from the headwaters of Silver Creek and its tributaries in the southeastern part of the Ochoco National Forest in eastern Oregon.

With no beaver engineers left to take care of the dams, the ponds disappeared. Grass meadows built up by sub-irrigation died out. Instead of 15,000 tons of pasturage along the streams, worth \$3 to \$5 a ton, the amount was reduced to a few hundred tons. Each year the water supply lessened. Good trout streams disappeared. Ranchers had to dig wells and pump water for their stock. Farmers lower down who had used the water for irrigation watched their ranches revert to a desert.

The trappers in one season cashed in their catch for \$4,000 or \$5,000. This may be compared to a continual yearly loss to stockmen of approximately \$50,000. It has now run into hundreds of thousands. The proof is plain that a dead beaver may be worth \$10 or \$15, while a live one is worth \$300.

Perhaps a better example of the loss of water, which means the destruction of wealth, is shown along Ochoco Creek and its tributaries. Approximately \$1,425,000 were spent on the Ochoco Dam to create a reservoir for the Ochoco

(Continued on Page 26)



Typical work of the Louisiana Beaver in St. Helena Parish.

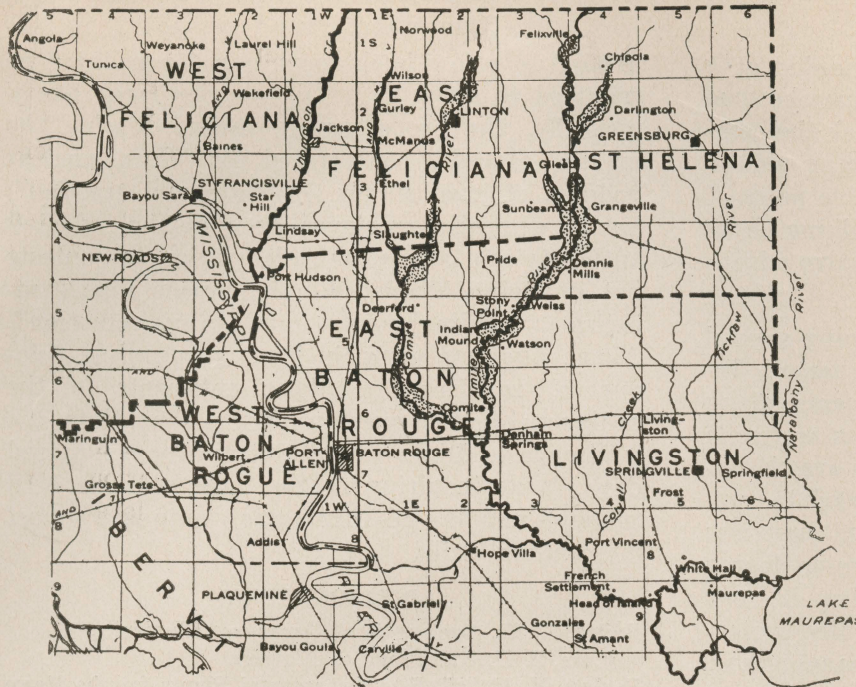
a Leaf-  
kley,

Bureau, although the  
present in manuscript

nt forms, or castes,  
ant—soldiers, large  
and the winged males  
definite division of  
ormously developed  
nest and protect the  
ging. The large and  
for the fungus gar-  
dens in deep subter-  
nis species do not eat  
t use them as a bed  
gi they use as food.

frequently in widely  
isiana (fig. 2). The  
nest is a low mound  
c. Owing to the fact  
vated in white, sandy  
a conspicuous feature  
mounds superficially  
by gophers and other  
hen digging their un-  
several openings to  
from a few holes up  
latter case the entire  
out about 1 acre. The sup-  
y openings are for  
g the deep under-  
ssages.

uary of 1935 attempts  
e to dig nests out but  
d not be located at  
ried to more than 4 1/2  
er efforts to locate the  
est were unsuccessful,  
r digging as deep as  
in this easily pene-  
oil. The centralized  
are far from the en-  
les—often as much as  
This affords protection  
n and renders control  
difficult except where



Map showing the location of Beaver colonies along the Comite and Amite Rivers in the parishes of East Feliciana, St. Helena, East Baton Rouge and Livingston.

THE BEAVER, FOREMOST WILDLIFE  
CITIZEN

(Continued from Page 13)

Irrigation District. The District went broke and the bond holders lost over \$1,000,000. Instead of enough water to flood 18,000 acres, only 8,500 are now watered.

Throughout the western part of our country the mania for building big dams jumps the popular mind from millions to billions of dollars. Are we not losing our breath in the race? Have we forgotten that it takes hundred and thousands of small water supplies to create big reservoirs? Have we forgotten that a great dam costing \$200,000,000 will silt up in fifty or a hundred years and be useless unless soil erosion is checked at the headwaters? Have we forgotten nature's use of land and water and her simple methods of creating wealth with no expenditure of money?

Here is where the beaver comes in. Now, we must admit that he doesn't fit into an irrigated farming community because he cannot look at a ditch without wanting to dam it. He is like a cow that gets into a garden. He shouldn't be killed, but put back where he belongs. In the past when any complaint was made of beavers doing damage, an ignorant legislature always opened the season. The trappers did the rest.

Fortunately at the present time a plan has been worked out by the State Game Commissions, the federal Forest Service and the Biological Survey whereby special live-traps are used to cap-

ture these animals where they are not wanted. They are transported alive back to the headwaters of streams in the dryer forested areas. The increase of small storage reservoirs through eastern Oregon is gradually building up a wealth that was once destroyed. All this is the wealth bestowed by nature, and is not burdened with a mortgage.

Old Man Beaver will always be a gentle, unheralded worker for his own sake. Sometimes he turns the laugh on his friends. Up in the Wallowa Valley a family of beavers built a dam below a little mill. The owners insisted that the beavers were a nuisance and asked for their removal. The game warden,

having no live-traps, served notice on the beavers to move down stream. With a shovel and axe he tore out half the dam. Since the habit of the beaver is to work only in the dark, he stuck his shovel and axe in the mud, and on the top he hung a bright lantern.

Returning in the morning, the warden was surprised to find that someone had stolen his tools. The dam was carefully re-built. The shovel, axe and lantern were buried in the mud and sticks, used by the beavers to reconstruct their dam.

**The Calcasieu-Marine National Bank**  
LAKE CHARLES, LOUISIANA  
**CAPITAL AND SURPLUS \$600,000.00**  
Largest Bank in Southwest Louisiana  
Member F. D. I. C.

708 Julia Street      RAYmond 1035  
**O. W. SUHREN**  
BATTERY AND ELECTRICAL  
BALLCRANK GREASING  
EQUIPMENT