



Nature's Engineers



A family of resident beavers created the large wetland just outside the mouth of Cave Springs. These impressive engineers will build a series of small dams along a stream and then build a large dam that submerges the other dams. In periods of drought, the water may recede but the small dams remain in place providing the beavers water access throughout their domain.

When beavers dam a waterway, the habitat changes; the water slows and spreads outside its original bank. In the process, many plants are flooded and sediment settles to the bottom of a new wetland. While certain species may be displaced by this change, many species take advantage of this wet opportunity. The trees killed by flooding attract a variety of woodpeckers. Larger dead trees can attract even larger species such as nest-building Ospreys and Great Blue Herons.

Over time, sediments fill in the beaver pond creating a small meadow with nutrient rich soil, forcing the beavers to travel elsewhere in search of a new home. The forest will then grow again continuing a cycle of ecological change that only a beaver can provide.



The Beaver's Hard Life

At one time, beavers were almost completely wiped out of existence due to early settlers' dependence on the trade of wild animal fur. One of the most valuably traded furs was a beaver pelt. Beaver fur was used to make warm beaver skin hats. As beaver populations dropped, the price of furs escalated, making them affordable only to the very

wealthy. Fashion trends also changed so that beaver skin hats were no longer in style. Since then, beavers have made a comeback. While gaining the reputation for being a troublemaker with his dam building, it is now understood that beaver dams are an integral part of the ecological life of a stream and forest.

Beavers/Quincey Banks



Red-headed Woodpecker/USFWS, Dave Menke

Skeleton Nursery

Areas affected by beaver dams can often be identified by standing dead timber. This skeletal forest actually supports an incredible array of life. Insects that feed on the dead wood provide numerous meals for woodpeckers, swallows, and warblers. The soft decaying wood is also ideal for excavating holes and building nests. Often these holes are recycled, and over time, the same hole could host a variety of cavity nesters including Red-headed and Downy woodpeckers and Eastern Bluebirds.



Gray Bat/ADCNR, Keith Hudson

Meet the Current Residents

Cave Springs is home to tens of thousands of Gray Bats. The Gray Bat was listed as an endangered species in 1976 after studies revealed a drop in population by over 50% due to human disturbance. Gray bat numbers seem to have stabilized as more of their caves needed for roosting and breeding are being protected.