BUSY AS A BEAVER

Have you ever heard the expression, "Busy as a beaver?" Well, it's true! Beavers really are very hard-working animals. They build dams and homes, called lodges. To get building materials, beavers do something amazing - they chew down trees!
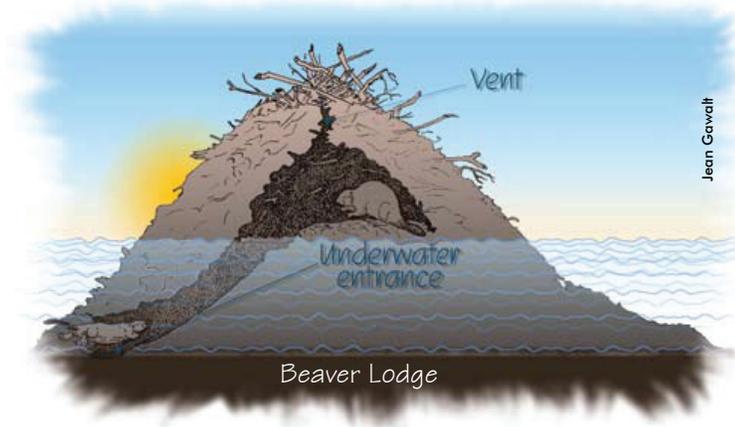
Can you imagine chewing a tree down with your teeth? Beavers can do it because, like all rodents, beavers' teeth are very sharp and hard. In winter, a beaver family needs a one- to two-ton feed pile of trees!

Beavers use branches to construct dams across streams to form a pond. They like to swim to their food because they are clumsy and slow on land. They feel safer and can move faster in the water. Beavers are important because they are such good pond builders. Wetlands that beavers create are homes for waterfowl, herons, muskrats, frogs, salamanders, dragonflies and many other living creatures.
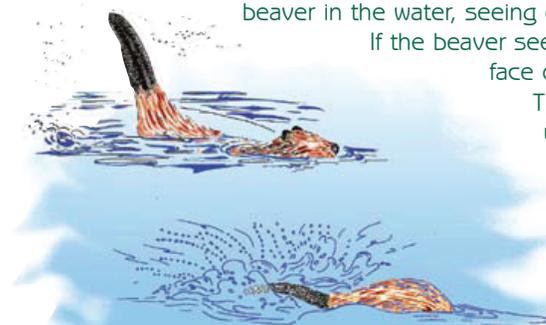

Tree chewed down by beaver

Jean Gawalt

Beaver Lodge

Beavers' hind feet are webbed, and their ears and nostrils close when they go under water. Beaver fur is waterproof and thick. It keeps them dry and so warm that they can swim around under the ice. They have special transparent eyelids that cover their eyes while they swim but let them see under the water. Beavers use their tails as propellers and for steering.

Beavers are most active at night. You are most likely to spot a beaver in the water, seeing only its eyes and the tip of its nose. If the beaver sees you, it may slap its tail on the surface of the water to warn other beavers. Then the beaver will dive and come up in another spot. You could have a long wait to see it again— beavers can hold their breath under water for up to 15 minutes!

Beaver sounding the alarm

Beavers are also important in New York State history. In Europe during the 1600s, their pelts were used for felt hats and fur trim on clothes. More than any other factor, the beaver was responsible for the French exploring the New World and for the Dutch and English building trading posts that opened New York to colonization.