

C. 77

THE HABITS AND HISTORY OF THE BEAVER

Int:
A beaver can't look at a stream of water without itching to build a dam. He is a born reclamationist because his one idea in life is to store up water. His dams may not look as neat as those put in by reclamation engineers, but he is always on the job to see that his dam holds water. His industry is proverbial. As an animal engineer, his fees for services are nothing. Thereby hangs an important tale for farmers and stockmen.

In eastern Oregon and other places where water is scarce, a beaver in the right place is worth more than (some) domestic animals. In the valleys or in an irrigated district, he is a nuisance. If he is discovered doing any damage, the first idea some people have is to kill him. This is a mistake. If an old hen flies over the fence and scratches out the garden seeds, she is not killed but put back in the right place. It is the same with a cow that gets into the corn.

When white people first came to America, the beaver was found in great numbers from the Atlantic to the Pacific. The abundance of this animal and the high value of its fur greatly influenced the exploration and early development of North America. It is an aquatic animal covered with coarse hair and a dense, silky under-fur. In frontier days, a beaver pelt was a medium of exchange.

Too many people still have the impression that the value of a beaver is in its fur. A beaver hide may be worth \$10 or \$15. In many of the arid areas of the west, a live beaver in its proper place is worth \$200 or \$300.

From 1853 to 1877, the Hudson's Bay Company sold 2,965,389 beaver hides in London, the average being 118,615 skins

annually. During the last quarter of the Eighteenth Century, about 150,000 beaver hides were exported each year by American fur companies. The Hudson's Bay Company marketed about 50,000 annually.

It is a matter of history and mathematics to figure out the numbers of beaver that have been killed in America and the approximate value of these hides. As far as the knowledge of the writer goes, no man has yet attempted to look back through the ages, study the topography of America and try to evaluate the industry of the untold millions of beaver that inhabited this country. Who can estimate their services in storing water, stopping erosion of the soil and creating the first meadows that later developed into thousands of fertile valleys? In these valleys, new generations of beaver established ponds and marshes for fish, waterfowl and other fur-bearing animals. Through centuries of water conservation, the beaver has aided in maintaining the water table which has prevented the land from reverting to a desert.

*The most fertile land in the west today is called
Beaver land.*