

New Beaver Activity at Royal Lake

By Greg Sykes (greg@grsykes.com)

Last summer's flood wrecked the beaver lodge, formerly where Rabbit's Branch empties into Royal Lake. The beavers (aka *Castor canadensis*) resettled on the other side of the lake, near Shane's Creek. With their arrival, people noticed beaver activity around this new location, especially gnawed trees and shrubs by the Shane's Creek shoal and the boat ramp's hillside. This sort of tree felling is perfectly normal in riparian habitats. Filling their ecological niche, beaver help to create healthy transition zones between wetlands and forests. Since humans purged many beavers from this area long ago, some people today do not know how the land/water interfaces should actually look. What may destroy forest trees, transitional woody species such as common alder, gray dogwood, silky dogwood, American elderberry, river birch, sycamore, and black willow thrive under the beavers' pruning. An opened canopy enables native marsh plants, such as cardinal flower, jewelweed, rushes, swamp mallow, and Joe-Pye weed, to flourish. Sometimes people feel inclined to prevent beavers from felling trees, but as we can see the best policy is to allow these animals to freely interact with their environment. An added beaver bonus: the rodents' jaws already chomped into a huge [autumn olive](#) and [Amur honeysuckle](#) infestation—two non-native invasive species on the Invasive Management Area's target list!

Also, beavers have excavated some canals around the shoal allowing water to flow a little easier. Many folks already enjoy following the transformations brought forth by North America's largest rodent. Come visit Royal Lake and observe these creatures in action! For more information about Fairfax County's beavers, please read my December 2008 back issue article, [A Tribute to Beavers](#).

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