

Mike Hawk seeks beavers in the Tahoe area

By Mike Hawk

When Mike Hawk first moved to the Tahoe area he really hoped there would be a lot of beavers. Why? Because Mike Hawk really loves beavers. But shortly after moving to Tahoe, Mike Hawk came to a scary conclusion; there aren't many beavers in Tahoe.

Why is this? Where are the beavers? Why is the population of beavers so small? Well Mike Hawk was determined to find out where the beavers are living and what we can do to bring more beavers to the Tahoe area. In order to get the lowdown on the beavers in the area, Mike Hawk had to go directly to an expert- Dr. Peter Busher, Professor of Science at Boston University (Busher received his PH.D. at UNR in 1980 (he is a REAL professor!)).

Dr. Busher studies Population Biology and Behavioral Ecology of Mammals, but his real love is in studying beavers. In fact, Dr. Busher area of expertise is in the studies of behavior and conservation of beavers, an area Mike Hawk is also incredibly interested in.

On his Boston University faculty page, Dr. Busher sums up his interest in beavers:

"Beavers represent a fascinating species to study in light of the current conservation biology movement. Beavers in most, if not all, North American locations are expanding in both numbers and range. This expansion comes after extirpation in many regions."

When Mike Hawk read this it struck him as odd. How can beavers be expanding in both number and range all throughout North America, yet the number of beavers in the Tahoe area seems to be on the decline? This was the question Mike Hawk had for Dr. Busher.

Mike Hawk hasn't seen many beavers in the Tahoe area, are there any here?

Dr. Busher: There are beavers in the Tahoe area- both north and south shores. I'm not sure anyone knows the exact population size at the moment. Additionally the actual number of animals most likely changes year to year based on mortality factors. But, you can find areas that have been occupied and areas that are occupied very near the lake and in many regions in the "greater Tahoe area." For example the little Truckee area going out on hwy 89 towards Sierraville has had beavers in the past and Sagehen Creek and Alder Creek have populations.

Mike Hawk wants to know why there aren't many beavers in the area?

Historically there are no records of native beaver populations in the high Sierra and the current populations are most likely the result of the growth of introduced populations. Part of the instability of the current "Tahoe" population may be due to lack of long-term suitable habitat.

For example, Sagehen Creek has had beavers on it since the 1950s, but many colonies were washed away during winter floods a few years ago and beavers have been slow to repopulate.

Same old story, lack of affordable housing...

Is there anything Mike Hawk can do to make the Tahoe area more appealing to beavers?

Beavers cut and utilize woody vegetation and their dam building activity raises the water level and alters the riparian vegetation. These activities are not always looked upon favorably by humans. As far as making the area more appealing for beavers I think the abundance of riparian woody vegetation (particularly aspen and willow) is important as is the general topography of the streams. Human-beaver conflicts occur when beaver .

Activity causes damage to buildings, vegetation and roads- so less human activity would make the area more appealing.



Who is Mike Hawk

By Mike Hawk

When The LowDown asked Mike Hawk to join its staff as an investigative reporter, Mike Hawk was thrilled.

Ever since Mike Hawk was small, he has wanted to be an investigative reporter. Nothing gets Mike Hawk more excited than uncovering the truth, and Mike Hawk is willing to lay it all on the line to dig deep and get that truth, whatever it may be, for The LowDown readers.

Tune in each month as Mike Hawk explodes onto the scene with investigative reporting that would make Heraldo Rivera jealous of Mike Hawk. Thanks for talking the time to read about Mike Hawk.

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