

Place-Based Education at Our Table Cooperative Farm
Spring 2020 Beavers: How plants and animals can change their environment to meet their needs.

Pre-K and Kindergarten:

Earth's Systems K-ESS2 Biogeology: Plants and animals can change their environment. (K-ESS2-2)

Most animals have at least some effect on their environment, but very few animals (other than humans) have as significant an impact on their environment as beavers. In just a few short weeks, a single family of beavers can turn a rushing stream into a huge wetland with interconnected ponds.

Other than humans, beavers are the only animal known to construct dams. Known as the engineers of the animal world, the beavers' anatomy is specifically designed to gnaw down trees, to transport logs and branches, and to create an interwoven and durable structure that can serve as a home (lodge) and a dam that can reshape waterways.

The beavers' ability to transform an entire landscape can have both positive and negative effects on the surrounding plants and animals.

What are some of the positive effects? The new landscape provides habitat for animals that may not have been there before: ducks, geese, herons, turtles and frogs, young trout and salmon, are just a few species that benefit from the deeper waterways. The rate of water flow in the streams also impacts the quality of water in both the newly created pond and in areas downstream.

What are some of the negative effects? The higher water levels and rerouted waterways that are created by the beaver dams can also create unwanted flooding in areas where farms, neighborhoods and roads might already exist.