

Beavers may be good for the environment

By Samantha Clark, Santa Cruz Sentinel

Californians are crossing their fingers for more rain after three punishing years of drought have left streams, rivers and wetland parched.

One animal has the potential to restore these dry landscapes.

With their industrial buck teeth and flat tails, beavers and their dams offer a defense against drought, a solution to reversing the effects of climate change. The rodents are known as ecosystem engineers. And they once populated most of California (and the Bay Area) until fur traders nearly wiped them out in the 19th century,

“This state has lost more of its wetlands than all other states, and beavers can rebuild those wetlands,” said Rick Lanman of the Institute for Historical Ecology in Los Altos. “Knowing that it is native should help guide restoration efforts.”

Beaver dams bestow benefits to the environment that we humans can't easily copy. They turn land into a sponge for water. Their gnawing and nesting promotes richer soil and slows down water, improving imperiled fish habitat. Their dams raise water tables, nourishing shrubbery alongside streams that stabilize eroding banks and add habitat for birds and deer. They also help the endangered California Red-legged frog.

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