



You are here : [Home](#) > [River](#) > [Boreal Forest and Biodiversity](#) > [Biodiversity in the Boreal Forest](#) > **Mammals**

[RAMP](#)[RIVER](#)[PEOPLE](#)[RESOURCES](#)[ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT](#)

## Biodiversity in the Boreal Forest: Mammals

The boreal forest is home to more than 85 species of mammals (Kavanagh 2006). Among these is the wood bison, North America's largest land mammal. A full-grown male bison can weigh as much as 1,000 kilograms, span a length of up to 3.8 meters, and stand almost 2 meters tall (Northwest Territories 2008).

In Alberta, widespread mammal species in the boreal forest include the black bear, moose, deer, red squirrel, snowshoe hare, southern red-backed vole, cinereous shrew, least chipmunk, deer mouse, and ermine. Less common species include the fisher, wolverine, river otter, Canada lynx, and gray wolf (NRC 2006).

Beavers are integral parts of the boreal forest. Man is the only other mammal on earth that rivals the beaver in its ability to influence its environment (Nearctica 2001). The beaver utilizes its continually growing teeth to fall trees and eat twigs and bark. It uses the fallen trees to build dams and lodges to live in, enabling it to survive the harsh winters. The largest beaver dam in the world, with a length of 850 m, is located within Wood Buffalo National Park (GeoStrategis 2008). Beaver dams flood parts of the forest, changing the landscape and creating habitat that can be used by fish, waterfowl, shorebirds and amphibians (Kavanagh 2006).

The snowshoe hare is an important food source for many of the boreal forest's predators such as lynx, foxes, martens, and some avian predators. The snowshoe hare has adapted to its environment by changing its colour twice a year. In the winter, the hare turns white with black tipped ears, while in the summer, the hare's fur becomes brown with patches of cinnamon, white, and black. This camouflage is one strategy the hare uses to evade its many predators (Yukon Department of Environment 2008).



**Bison**

Source: <http://www.turtletrack.org/Issues01/Co12012001/Art/Bison.jpg>  
(click to enlarge)



**A beaver dam blocks a river, flooding the land upstream.**

Source: <http://www.tightline.biz/Beaver%20Dam%202.jpg>  
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[Next page: Biodiversity in the Boreal Forest: Birds](#) ►

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