

Beaver Lodge Hunt and Find!

DCR State Parks North Region



TRIP-TIP SELF-GUIDED ADVENTURE

Welcome

Explore the woods and find the homes of our largest rodent! The beaver is a rarely seen secretive animal, but their sign is quickly noticed if you know where and how to look. This self-guide **Trip-Tip** takes you on a beaver lodge discovery in two parks to find lodges in four locations. Sharpen your skills of nature observation as you look for sign that is hidden in plain sight—things that a lot of people just don't see. Your journey will take you to **Bradley Palmer State Park** in Topsfield and **Harold Parker State Forest** in North Andover, two forested parks that are about 1/2 hour apart. Come out for the whole day and find them all or make it a two-day adventure! This is your winter season challenge. Are you ready?



Share Your Adventure!

Share your **Trip-Tip** adventure with others through word of mouth, or on social media using the hashtags **#massdcr** and **#dcrtrip**.

Things To Know Before You Go

Be safe in the winter with appropriate clothing. Instead of staying warm outdoors, get outside and enjoy the crisp winter air, but know when to call it quits if you get too cold. Remember, there is no such thing as bad weather, just bad clothes.

- Carry-in, carry-out all of your belongings, including trash.
- Stay on designated trails.
- All pets on 10-foot maximum leash, attended to at all times. Clean-up after your pet and dispose of waste off-site.
- Observe all posted rules and regulations.
- Be aware of hunting seasons and wear blaze orange when appropriate.
- Please do not disturb the beaver lodges and dams in any way; observe wildlife from a distance.
- Please do not walk onto the ice! Fluctuating temperatures have made it too thin.
- **Stay warm in winter; dress appropriately with boots, hats and gloves.**

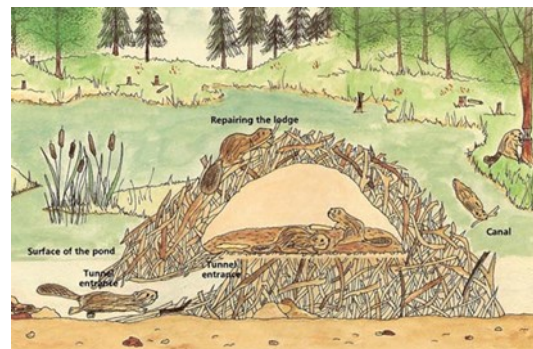
A little backstory to start your adventure:

Beavers build unique structures that are amazingly waterproof and cozy in the winter. The family group consists of the mother, father and their young, called “kits.” They sometimes share their space, not only with two generations of kits, but sometimes with muskrats as well! The graphic shows a typ-

ical lodge layout, including their underwater entrance. Beavers are excellent builders, and sometimes build the lodge before they dam the water to surround their house. That means they're good planners too!

Your Mission:

- To explore and observe the work that beavers do every night
- To build observation skills to amaze your family and friends!
- To photograph your discoveries and share them with us on social media: **#massdcr** and **#dcrtriptip**.



Ready, Set, Go!

#1 Lodge Hunt

Bradley Palmer State Park

40 Asbury St., Topsfield, MA 978-887-5931

Website: <https://www.mass.gov/locations/bradley-palmer-state-park>

Winter hours: Sunrise to sunset

Winter Parking Fees: Free

Restrooms: Clivus restroom near the headquarters building

Beaver Lodge on the Pond

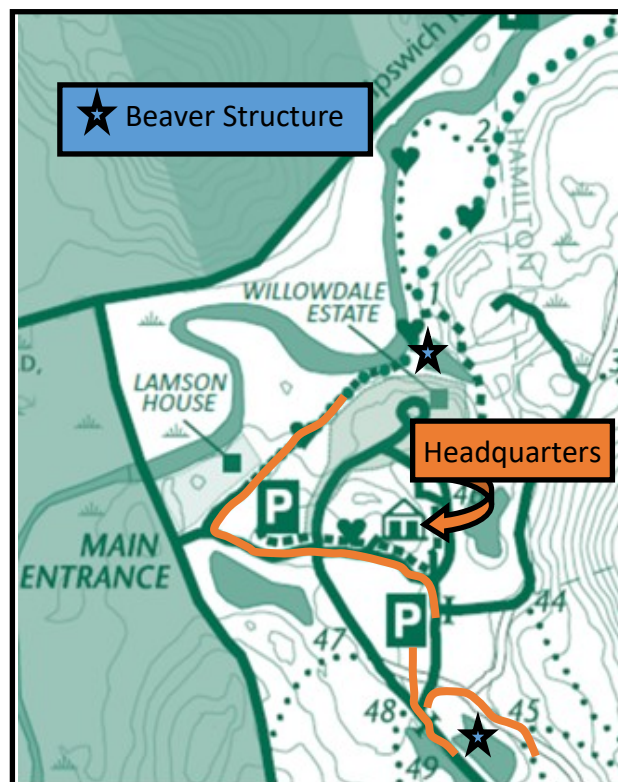
Your hunt begins at the **Bradley Palmer State Park** parking lot. Walk past the closed gate that leads to the paved road with water on either side. *What do you think caused this pond?* You're right! The beavers are responsible for some of the level of this water. Look to your left and you will easily see a beaver lodge. Look very closely at this lodge. *What is it made of?*

Noticed that there is no "door." *How do they get in and out?* (There was a hint earlier).

Continue your search by walking around to the other side of the pond behind the gate. Now your keen observation skills will be put to the test! Beavers come out on land almost every night to eat, find building materials, and cut down trees. Let's look for signs that they have been out of the water. You can find these along the shore and past where the pond ends.

Here are some clues to identify what you're looking for:

Clue #1: Sometimes you can see "trails" on the edge of the water where they come out and go back in. They use the same ones all the time.



Clue #2: Find a chewed tree or branch. Sometimes they nibble all along an entire tree that has fallen. They are eating the *cambium*, the part of the tree that makes the wood. Ewwww! But in summer, they enjoy the green vegetation that grows all around the pond.

Clue #3: See the basket-like structure in the pond? What do you think it is? (Answer at the end #1)

Clue #4: Even though beavers come out on land, sometimes the ice is too thick. So they have enough to eat for the entire winter, they store food in the fall. Check near the lodge—do you see thin sticks sticking through the ice? That is their “**cache**,” a pantry for beavers!



#2 Beaver dam hunt

Retrace your steps back to your car, or you can walk. Go back toward the park entrance and walk to the trail just past the dark gray house. This is Bradley Palmer’s Accessible Trail. It was built for people of all abilities. Even wheelchairs can go on this trail.

Walk to the boardwalk, just a three-minute hike. On your way there, be a Nature Detective and look around you to see signs from all different kinds of animals. Just before you get to the picnic tables, look for a snag (dead tree) on the hill on your right. *What do you think made all those holes?* (Answer at the end #2) Take a photo and post “**I found the snag!**” to social media: #**massdcr** and #**dcrtriptip**

When you get to the boardwalk and reach the water, look to your right. *What is it?* That’s right! It’s a beaver dam. You can see how long and well-built it is. Beavers work almost every night to make sure their dam is secure and holding water. If they stopped working, the dam would soon get holes and eventually fall apart, allowing the water to drain out. Then this place becomes a beaver meadow, a very rich environment for plant life to return. When beavers build dams, they really improve the environment and provide wonderful homes for many animals.

After you have observed the dam and looked for other beaver sign, walk back to the picnic tables and look out over the Ipswich River. *Can you find the beaver lodge?* Binoculars will help with this. *Do you see any other animals? If you’re really lucky, **river otters** are sometimes spotted here.*

If you’re up for more, next stop is Harold Parker State Forest!

Harold Parker State Forest

Headquarters: 305 Middleton Rd., North Andover, MA 978-686-3391

Website: <https://www.mass.gov/locations/harold-parker-state-forest>

Winter hours: Sunrise to sunset

Winter Parking Fees: Free

Restrooms: No restrooms available during COVID.

Our second adventure is to one of our first state parks, Harold Parker State Forest. Here are 3,500 acres and many miles of trails for your enjoyment. Your beaver lodge hunt will take you approximately 2-2.5 miles in total, so be ready with water, a lunch or snack, and warm clothes, including hat and gloves. A pair of binoculars is always handy for distance viewing.

#3 Lodge Hunt

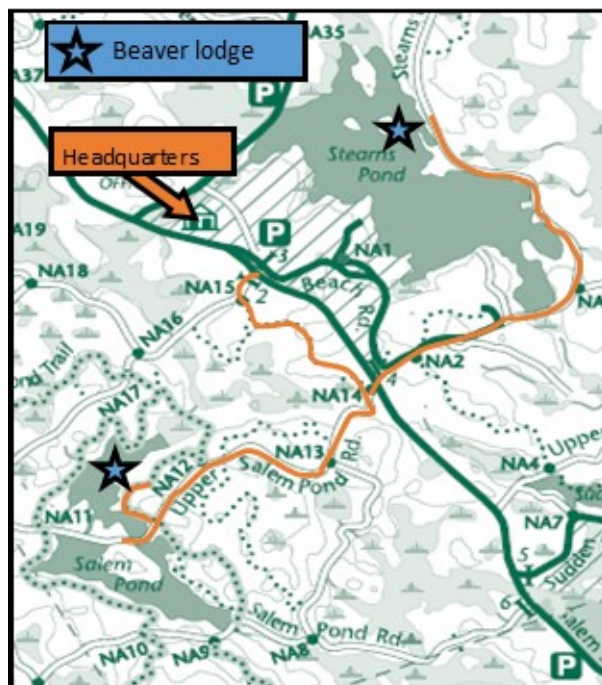
You should start by **downloading a map** from the website listed above. Intersection numbers on the map correspond to brown carsonite numbers on the ground to assure you won't get lost. This particular hike is easy and straight forward.

From the headquarters parking lot, cross Middleton Rd. and walk past the gate, then take an immediate left on the trail at marker NA15. Hike this trail until you reach a fire road at NA14 and turn right. Follow this road until you reach the water, about a half mile. This is **Salem Pond**, one of the most scenic areas in the park.

Sights and Sounds

Stand on the small bridge and listen carefully for any forest sounds of birds and the booming of the ice.

Please do not venture out on any ice! Fluctuating temperatures may make the ice unreliable.



Beaver Lodge Hunt

Back track just a couple hundred feet, and when you're away from the water, look for a trail to your left that goes along the pond. Take this trail down to the water until you see what you have come for—that's right! A big beaver lodge.

Is this lodge occupied? What signs would you look for?

Do you see a food cache? Any sign on the banks that the beaver have come onto land? Any chewed branches/trees?

This is a great location to sit and eat your lunch and get ready for the next beaver lodge hunt. Even though you're not too far from neighborhoods and stores, it feels like you are in the middle of the wilderness here.

Retrace your steps and find your way back on Middleton Rd. to NA14. You're becoming a navigator!

Cross Middleton Rd. and enter the forest again on the paved surface. There are numerous places to explore the shore of Stearns Pond on this hike. You will cross a bridge, where you can walk to the left to observe the spillway (dam) that forms the pond. This spillway was built 90 years ago by the **Civilian Conservation Corps!** In fact, they also built the road you're walking on and the headquarters building. Keep walking until you almost reach the end of the pond. You will see an island to your left with a huge beaver lodge on one side. Beavers also build "bank" lodges like this when they feel safe from predators, like on the island.

Now, you can be a real detective! Look for **scent mounds**, small mounds that beavers make to mark their



territory, like boundary markers. The smell is **castoreum**, a substance that beavers use to claim their territory. It is also used in "leather" type perfumes.

Congratulations! You've found them all! Use your hike back to explore the shore of Stearn's Pond for more beaver sign; chewed sticks, scent mounds and small trees that have been cut. Find the "freshest" ones.

Bear right on the paved road when you reach Middleton Rd. This road will take you back to the headquarters parking lot.

Thank you for joining in this adventure! Please keep coming to our state parks and help us preserve and conserve these special places that provide homes for so much wildlife.

Answers to Questions

Answer #1: This structure is called a "Beaver Deceiver." The sound of running water drives beavers crazy! That sound causes the beavers to build their dams with sticks and mud. In order to keep the beavers from jamming the culverts with sticks and mud to stop the running water, the park staff puts these Beaver Deceivers in to fool them. The Beaver Deceivers allow the water to run quietly through the culvert.

Answer #2: Dead trees are so important for animals. A dead tree can be an animal's house (like a flying squirrel or woodpecker) and it can also be a cafeteria for many birds because it's full of insects.

Thank you for joining us for this Beaver Lodge Hunt Trip-Tip! You have become a Nature Detective and now can use your skills for more park adventures.

During your next Trip-Tip, perhaps you've visited a park you didn't know about before. Maybe you'll meet a new bird or try a new sport. We hope that you will be invigorated to take even more Trip-Tip outdoor adventures all year long! Embrace Winter!

The Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) oversees over 450,000 acres of state parks, forests, beaches, bike trails, parkways, watershed lands, and dams across the Commonwealth. DCR's mission is to: *Protect, promote and enhance our common wealth of natural, cultural and recreational resources for the well-being of all.* For more information visit: <https://www.mass.gov/orgs/department-of-conservation-recreation>.

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MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF
CONSERVATION AND RECREATION