

River Otter

(*Lutra canadensis*)

WHAT TO LOOK FOR:

Appearance:

A large, semi-aquatic member of the weasel family with short legs, a long tapering tail, and a rather blunt, small, and somewhat flattened head. The hair is dense and relatively short, ranging in color from pale chestnut to dark chocolate brown on the back to silver gray on the belly. Females are one-third smaller than males.

Measurements:

Overall length = 40 – 60"
Tail length = 1/3 of overall length
Weight = 15 – 35 lbs.

Similar Species:

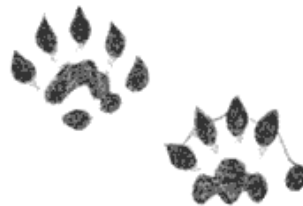
Mink are also semi-aquatic, but are smaller in size and are usually a uniform brown with an occasional white patch on the chest or throat.

Tracks and Sign:

Otter tracks measure 3 ¾" long by 3 ¾" wide, although the rear track often shows only the heel pad and claws.



Photo by Wyoming Wildlife



Track



Track pattern



Snowslide

<http://yahooligans.yahoo.com/content/animals/track/3909.html>

Otters will occasionally make a running slide down hill or on flat ground over snow and ice. Look for a trough about 5 to 6 inches wide when snow is 2 inches deep. Scat (feces) is another sign to look for. Otters will use a prominent location as a latrine (toilet sight), and one or more otters will return to the same site many times, leaving an area with a large amount of scat that contains fish scales and small bones.

WHERE TO FIND:

Lakes, streams, and aquatic habitats in aspen, cottonwood-riparian, riparian shrub, willow, most meadow grasslands, and marsh-swamp wetlands.

STATUS:

Native Species Status 4 (NSS 4) – Population status and trends are unknown, although they are suspected to be stable, and its habitat is vulnerable, although there is no ongoing significant habitat loss.