

# NEWS Release

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

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BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT OR-11-18

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## A Dam Important Find!

### North America's Earliest Beaver Discovered in Oregon

**PORTLAND, Ore.** – A new fossil find represents the earliest record of living beavers (*Castor*) in North America. A pair of teeth was found on BLM land near Dayville, Oregon by BLM staff during the course of their normal duties. These teeth come from the Rattlesnake Formation and are between 7 and 7.3 million years old.

Worldwide, the earliest “true” beaver, as we would think of them today, comes from Germany, about 10 to 12 million years ago. These beavers then spread across Asia, and eventually crossed the Bering Land Bridge to North America. The new find helps resolve when beavers dispersed to North America from Asia, and when the two living species, the *North American Castor canadensis* and *Eurasian Castor fiber*, diverged.

Previously, the earliest known records of living beavers in North America were from Nebraska, California, and northern Oregon, and date around 5 million years old. It is fitting that the earliest modern beavers are found in Oregon, since Oregon is the Beaver State; the beaver is the Oregon State animal, and the mascot of Oregon State University.

The specimens will be going on display in the Thomas Condon Paleontology Center, at John Day Fossil Beds National Monument. The new find is described in an article appearing in the current issue of the *Journal of Paleontology*.

<http://www.journalofpaleontology.org>

The fossil teeth found near Dayville, OR are almost identical to living beaver teeth, showing that the animal has changed very little in the last seven million years. This indicates that their appearance and role in the environment would have been the same in the past. Paleontologists have been studying John Day Basin for well over 100 years, but there is still much more to learn about Oregon's past.

John Day Fossil Beds National Monument includes many of the best studied sites, but the vast majority of fossil localities, including the one with these beaver fossils, are found on adjacent Bureau of Land Management administered lands. The National Park Service and the Bureau of Land Management have co-managed fossil resources in eastern Oregon under an agreement for 25 years, which has resulted in the John Day basin being regarded as one of the most important outdoor laboratories for understanding biological evolution and climate change over the past 40 million years.

Such collaboration between federal agencies has allowed each to fulfill its mission of preserving important resources for future generations while facilitating important scientific research. New finds like this occur regularly, highlighting the importance of preserving fossils on public lands, which aids scientific research and allows the public to enjoy these valuable natural resources.



Oregon State Office

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Additional information about BLM's paleontology program is available online at:

<http://www.blm.gov/or/resources/heritage/index.php>

Additional information about the National Park Service John Day Fossil Beds is also available online at:

<http://www.nps.gov/joda/index.htm>

**About the BLM:** The BLM manages 245 million acres of public land known as the National System of Public Lands. The lands are primarily located in 12 Western states, including 75 million acres in Alaska. With a budget of about \$1 billion, the bureau also administers 700 million acres of sub-surface mineral estate throughout the nation. The BLM's multiple-use mission is to sustain the health and productivity of the public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations.

