

# Magnuson Nature Programs

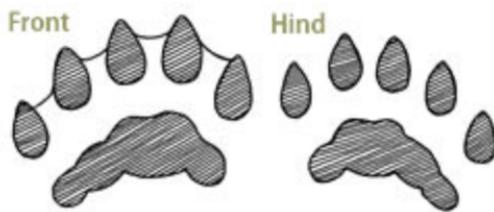
## North American River Otters



**River Otters** are mammals with long, streamlined bodies, short legs, webbed toes and long, tapered tails. The adult males weigh about 20-28 pounds and are about 4 feet long (including their tails). The females are somewhat smaller than the males.

Although seldom seen, River Otters are common throughout Washington in streams, lakes, wetlands, and along marine coasts.

River Otters are now among the animals in Magnuson Park!



**Figure 3.** River otter tracks show five pointed toes around a small heel pad. Tracks are 3 to 3½ inches wide and 3 to 4 inches long. (Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife.)

When traveling on land, River Otters walk, run or bound. Their fastest gait is bounding. River Otters make trails along the edges of lakes, streams, and other waterways. Often their trails are where they're moving across land to get from one body of water to another.

### What do River Otters eat?

River Otters primarily eat fish. They are also known for eating whatever is easiest to find - insects, snails, aquatic worms, oysters, shellfish, crayfish and frogs. River Otters will also eat small rodents, bird eggs, small birds, and young raccoons or kits.

River Otters have a very good sense of smell and often follow their nose to whatever food is in big supply.





### Hey, Nature Detectives!

River Otter scat has been seen in Magnuson Park. Keep your eyes open and you might find it too! River Otters thoroughly chew their food, so their droppings will contain only fine bits of fish scales, bones, and shells. The texture is oily, the smell fishy. Droppings are left at the water's edge, along trails and near dens.



Want to see a River Otter?

Sit quietly by the water's edge for your best chance of seeing an otter. An otter is fairly near-sighted and may not notice you sitting nearby, if you're quiet.

Never try to get too close to an otter. A female with pups may attack a human!

Did you know?

River Otters can stay underwater for up to 8 minutes. They can close their ears and their nostrils to keep water out.

River Otters live in all types of habitats. The only thing consistent with their choice of habitat is accessibility to high quality water.

River Otters will only settle where there is sufficient coverage, usually vegetation or physical structures like rock piles.

River Otters use dens for giving birth and for shelter from harsh weather. Birthing dens are lined with small sticks, shredded vegetation and other available materials.

Dens sites include hollow logs, log jams, piles of driftwood or boulders. Sometimes River Otter will use a dam that has been abandoned by a beaver.

River Otter like their dens to be well hidden. They're often located near the water's edge and will have an entry far below the surface of the water.

River Otters give birth to their pups in the spring. They will usually have 2-3 pups. Young otters begin to play at about 4 weeks of age and learn to swim at about 7 weeks of age.

By fall, they can be on their own.

A typical social group for River Otters is a female and her offspring.

