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Worth A Dam – Martinez Beavers
California, USA

A Space for Beavers

Can one city make room for downtown beavers?

That was the question facing Martinez California in 2007, and for a long time it looked like the answer would be a resounding 'no'. Since beaver relocation is illegal in the golden state there were really only two options to be considered. Trapping them or letting them stay in the downtown creek right alongside the courthouse and the parking meters.

Even today it's hard to say what city officials believed less at the time: the promise that a caged pipe installed by a man from Vermont would keep the water flowing and prevent a city from flooding or that a single family of urban beavers would create a wildlife oasis - complete with steelhead, heron, otter, wood duck and even mink! Without intending to Martinez found itself at the center of dynamic tale of controversy, restoration, and citizen science, becoming arguably the first great civic riparian success story of the 21st century.

For ten years the family of beavers resided in that creek, at one time maintaining as many as five dams. Twenty-seven kits were born during their unexpected tenure, while the story of the Martinez beavers was told and retold on the news, magazines, books and documentaries. The successful beaver festival thrown in their honor is now in its 13th year, the nonprofit 'Worth A Dam' formed to protect them has become a strong international voice in beaver advocacy, countless other cities in California and beyond have learned from their example and the website devoted to their mascot has become an international waystation for beaver information teaching both how and why to exist.

But it all began very simply. It began with some beavers.