**The North American River Otter: The Good, The Bad, and The Future**

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**Introduction**

For the past three months I have participated in a camera trapping research project. A mammal that the cameras continually caught was the river otter on the shores of Lake Taneycomo. This piqued my interest, since I was not even aware of a population of river otters on Taneycomo. It turns out there is a long saga surrounding the river otter, not just in Missouri, but in the entire Midwest. My audience is the people of Missouri who have encountered otters in some way or another, whether it be good or bad and whether you are a private landowner, business owner, or government official, my hope is to make you understand the river otter and their importance in Missouri. I am hoping to educate my audience about the river otter, from an ecological and economical perspective, and maybe even convince you that the river otter is a needed and deserving creature in our rivers and streams and that there is a way that they can be managed that can benefit both them and us humans. I am writing on behalf of *The Great American West*, a blog that is dedicated towards the ecology of the western United States, where the river otter is found as well.

*Photo courtesy of Jim Rathert, MDC*

**Scientific Description of the River Otter**

The North American River Otter (*Lontra canadensis*) is in the weasel family (Mustelidae) which is in the order Carnivora according to the *Missouri Department of Conservation Otter fact page (2018)*. The river otter has webbed feet, long tapered tails, thick oily fur, layers of warmth producing fat, long whiskers for sensory purposes, and a keen sense of smell. They are powerful swimmers and can be submerged underwater for over three minutes. Otters are carnivores and feed upon crustaceans, fish, and small mammals.