

Giardiasis (often unfairly called Beaver Fever)

This intestinal disease is caused by the protozoan **Giardia lamblia**.

There are two stages in its life cycle:

- The trophozoite stage is a single cell with a sucking disk that can attach to a host's intestine. This stage cannot survive for long outside of its host.
- The cyst stage is much tougher, and can survive for long periods, especially in cold water.

The Carriers

Despite the popular name, it is not usually beavers that spread the disease. The main source of infection is **humans** who poop too close to an open water source. Backcountry campers should dig a small trench 20 cm deep and 30 m away from water when defecating.

A single stool from a person or animal with a moderate infection can contain several million cysts. Since ingestion of 10 or more cysts can produce infection in another creature, the importance of outdoor hygiene cannot be overstated. Dogs can also suffer from and spread the parasite, and are careless about where they "go".

Muskrat and beavers can become infected when the cysts wash into their habitat, and no treatment is available to them. Cats, horses, deer, sheep and coyotes can also become infected with this organism.

Symptoms

Giardiasis is not life threatening, but if untreated can cause severe fatigue and weight loss. Symptoms may include chronic diarrhea, abdominal cramps, gas and bloating, and loss of appetite. These effects may appear 5 – 25 days after cyst ingestion, and may last up to 6 weeks. Some people can get infected and not show any acute symptoms.

Diagnosis

Stool samples can reveal either the cysts or trophozoites, though victims may not excrete any cysts until they have suffered the symptoms for some time. So diagnosis in the early stages of the disease can be difficult.

Most of **Winlaw Creek** (everything upstream from the water intakes) sees very little traffic from humans and their dogs. Neither beaver nor muskrat find habitat there, and other wildlife is little inclined to poop in the water. (And they would have to be infected to transmit the disease.)

Let's keep our pets away from the stream and keep the water safe.