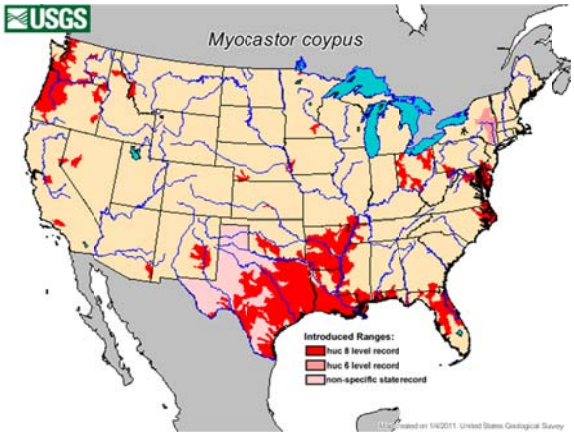
WANTED: NUTRIA (AKA *Myocastor coypus)*



Nutria (*Myocastor coypus*) are large semi-aquatic mammals native to South America and introduced into the United States for fur farming as early as 1899. They were initially imported to California, Oregon, Washington, Michigan, New Mexico, Louisiana, Ohio and Utah. Fur farming became more popular in the 1930s and nutria were transported to other states as well. When fur farms failed nutria were introduced into the wild and began populating there.

Today, nutria are present in 15 states, with an established presence in the Pacific Northwest region one area. Nutria are smaller than beavers and larger than muskrats, and are distinguishable by their tails, which resemble a rat's rounded tail, while beavers have horizontally flattened tails and muskrats have vertically flattened tails. Nutria can grow at alarmingly fast fates, and in ideal conditions a breeding pair of nutria can multiply to 16,000 individuals in just three years. Nutria can be found in both the water (lakes, ponds, wetlands, etc), and on the land near water areas. They feed on green vegetation.

Not only can nutria become aggressive (and have scary orange teeth to back up their hostility), but the animals are also capable of carrying a large number of diseases, pathogens and infections. Nutria are also known to over-graze wetland habitats, are competition for native species (such as muskrats), and can cause erosion from drilling into banks. In the future, climate change could seriously increase the population of nutria, whose range is limited by cold winter temperatures. Mortality rates, which can climb to 90 percent during unusually cold winters, keep populations in check. Nutria could also spread in their population ranges with warmer temperatures.