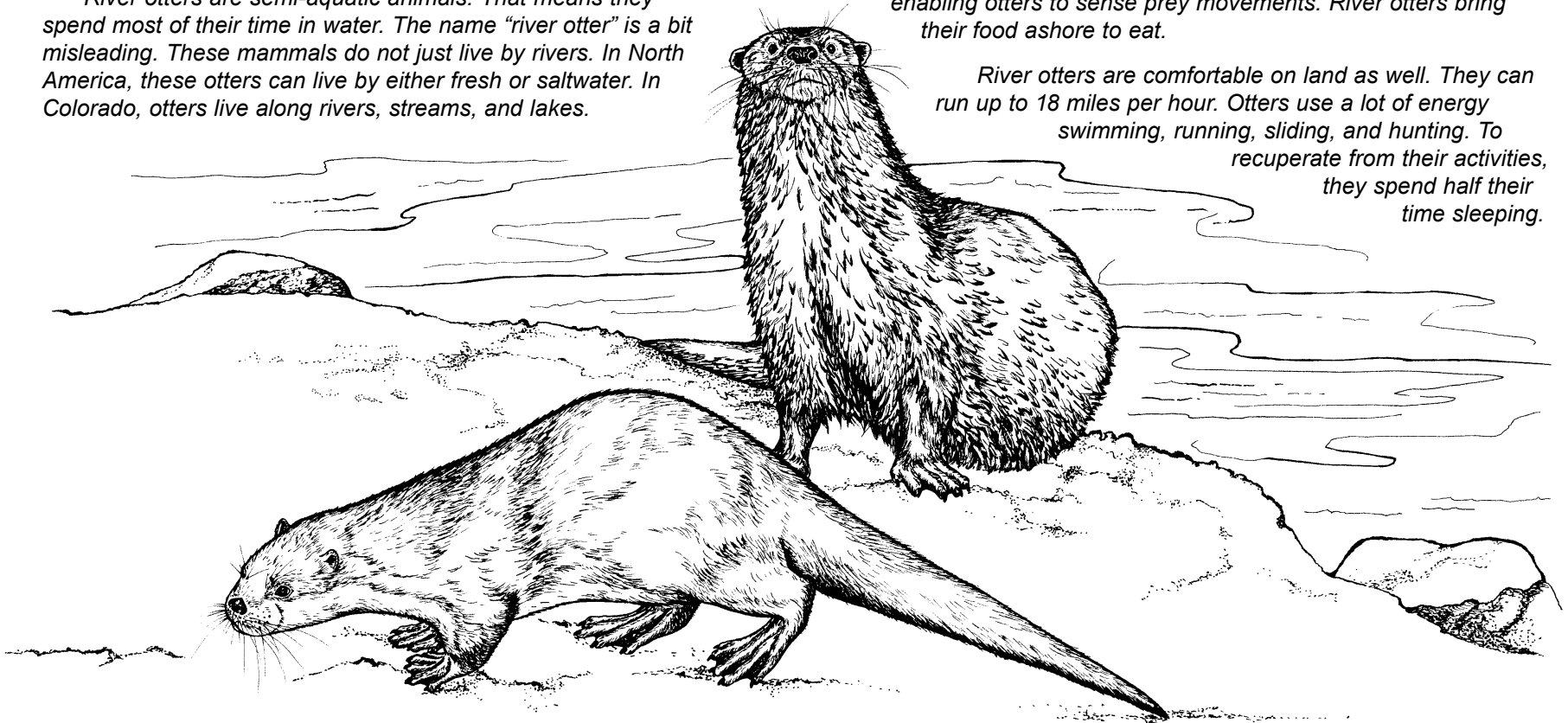


River Otters

River otters are semi-aquatic animals. That means they spend most of their time in water. The name "river otter" is a bit misleading. These mammals do not just live by rivers. In North America, these otters can live by either fresh or saltwater. In Colorado, otters live along rivers, streams, and lakes.

Otters are carnivores. They have sharp teeth adapted for eating meat. In clear water, otters capture prey by sight. They feed on fish, crayfish, crabs, frogs, and small mammals. In murky water, their long, thick whiskers are extremely sensitive to touch, enabling otters to sense prey movements. River otters bring their food ashore to eat.

River otters are comfortable on land as well. They can run up to 18 miles per hour. Otters use a lot of energy swimming, running, sliding, and hunting. To recuperate from their activities, they spend half their time sleeping.



River otters are well-adapted to life in water. With streamlined bodies, rudder like tails, and semi-webbed feet, otters are powerful swimmers. Their ears and nostrils have valves to shut out water. They can remain submerged for several minutes, swim up to a quarter mile underwater, and dive to 55 feet. The otters' eyes are small and set near the top of their heads so that they can see even when the rest of their bodies are submerged in water. A fat layer under the skin and dense, oily fur protect otters from getting cold—even in extremely icy water.

River otters were common in Colorado back in the 1800s. With settlement, water pollution, and damming of rivers, otters disappeared from the state by the early part of this century. The Colorado Division of Wildlife began bringing otters back to Colorado in 1976. Now, there are healthy otter populations on the Green, Gunnison, Piedra, and Colorado rivers.

