

PONDEROSA PINE

Mature live ponderosa pine are stately trees with an imposing forest presence (Figure 1). They can be identified by their distinctive orange-brown bark, which is arranged in large vertically oriented plates along the tree bole (Figure 2). In the spring when the sap begins to flow their bark gives off a pleasant vanilla-like aroma that saturates the forest air (Figure 3). The dark yellow-green needles are 5-10" long and grow in clusters of three. The cones, similar in color to the bark, are 3-6" long and 2-4" in diameter (Figure 4). The needles are the longest and the mature cones the largest of any tree species that grow in Colorado. As dead trees (referred to as snags) begin their decomposition process, chunks of bark "slip", or fall from the tree, oftentimes exposing

cavity nesting holes (Figure 5). At some point in time all of the bark may have fallen off, leaving only a gray skeleton in the woods, causing some to wonder what tree species it might have been; or it may topple over when the root system has deteriorated sufficiently that it can no longer support the snag in an upright position (Figure 6). Once on the ground, microorganisms work rapidly (aided by greater moisture levels near the ground surface) and accelerate the decomposition process (Figure 7). All that is left of the stately pine is the organic medium that is eventually created that contributes to the fertility of the soil (Figure 8). And a seedling grows in it, on its way to becoming another stately pine. (Figure 9)



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7



Figure 8



Figure 9