

Importance of Dead Trees for Wildlife

Dead trees (snags) and the subsequent downed log provide habitat for many living organisms, including fungi, mosses, lichens, invertebrates, birds, mammals, reptiles, and amphibians. The decayed surface of a snag provides a growth substrate for fungus, moss, and lichen. Invertebrates such as scorpions, moths, beetles, and ants use spaces under the bark as cover and as places for foraging. Birds use cavities for nesting or roosting and branches and broken tops are used as perches and to support nests structures. Primary cavity excavators, such as woodpeckers and nuthatches, need the soft wood of snags to create cavities for nesting. Secondary cavity nesters, such as bluebirds, flycatchers, swallows, and small owls, nest in old abandoned holes that were created by primary cavity excavators. Cavities serve as mammal dens, food storage, and resting and escape cover. Bats roost in crevices created by lightning scars and under loose bark - an 18" by 24" piece of bark can support more than two hundred roosting bats! Once snags fall and become downed logs, the dead tree then becomes useful in other ways.

Elevated areas on downed logs are used as lookouts and feeding sites for reptiles, birds and small mammals. The spaces between loose bark and wood are used as hiding and thermal cover by invertebrates, reptiles, and amphibians. Protected areas under the log are used as nesting cover by birds and as hiding and thermal cover by mammals. The root wad is also useful to birds for perching and nesting. Once the down log has further decomposed, the soft wood is used by squirrels for storing food and by mice for constructing burrows. The duff or sawdust is used by some birds for dusting and by deer and elk for resting.