Douglas Squirrel
Photo ©Tom Kogut

Frequently Asked Questions

What is a snag?

A snag is defined as a standing dead tree. They are also called wildlife trees, which includes any defective tree, both live or dead. Agents which cause the death of trees—such as fire, insects and disease—are part of the natural life cycle of trees and the forest.

Don't snags create a fire hazard and need to be cut down to reduce fire risk?

There is no consensus among research scientists that standing snags cause more intense wildfires. Fire behavior is complex and site dependent. Some studies have shown that standing snags can reduce severe fire risk by keeping flammable fuels off of the forest floor. When snags fall naturally, they can slowly accumulate on the forest floor over years or decades, making for less fuel on the ground at any one time.

Why are snags beneficial for wildlife?

As snags age and decay, their wood becomes soft. This allows woodpeckers to excavate nesting cavities. These cavities provide critical nest and shelter sites for hundreds of animals, including bees, songbirds, ducks, raptors, forest carnivores and many, many more!

Why should I be concerned about snags? Don't forests naturally contain sufficient habitat for animals?

Historically, the forests of the Northwest looked a lot different than today. One of the most important structures missing from today's intensively managed forests are snags. Snags have little immediate economic value to humans and were historically seen as an unnecessary hazard. However, we now know that snags provide irreplaceable habitat for wildlife—including many species with long-term economic benefit for humans, such as insect-eating swifts and bats, rodent-eating falcons and owls, and bark beetle-eating woodpeckers and nuthatches.

Without snags, the entire ecosystem suffers.

What You Can Do

- Leave snags and dying trees standing in the forest.
- Leave snags in burned areas—trees killed by fire provide habitat for beneficial wildlife.
- Use only downed wood for firewood. Limit your take in any one area.
- Protect dead wood on your property whenever safe to do so.
- Spread the word about the value of dead trees for healthy forests.

White-Breasted Nuthatch
Photo ©Karen Zook

For more information:

www.wdfw.wa.gov/living/snags/

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Dead Trees BRING LIFE TO THE FOREST

The value of snags for healthy forest ecosystems

Pileated Woodpecker
Photo ©Paul Bannick


Mountain Bluebird
Photo ©Karen Zook

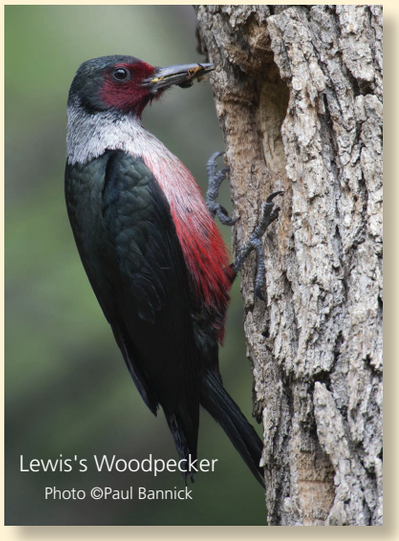
Think twice about removing dead or dying trees from your property—deadwood is valuable for wildlife!

Beneficial wildlife that require snags include

- **Swallows, swifts, and bats:** These species eat up to 10,000 insects in one day. Providing dead wood ensures that your property will become the first place they forage.
- **Owls and hawks:** Birds of prey are important predators for many agricultural rodent pests. Even species that do not require snags for nesting prefer the open perches provided by snags for hunting prey.
- **Woodpeckers:** Woodpeckers are worth their weight in gold—or insects—because their foraging reduces forest insect populations. They specialize on wood-boring and bark beetle larvae, reducing and controlling outbreaks of these harmful forest pests.

Providing snags for woodpeckers is an important first step in attracting wildlife to your yard.

TREES CAN BE MORE VALUABLE DEAD THAN ALIVE


Lewis's Woodpecker
Photo ©Paul Bannick

More than 100 species of northwest wildlife use snags

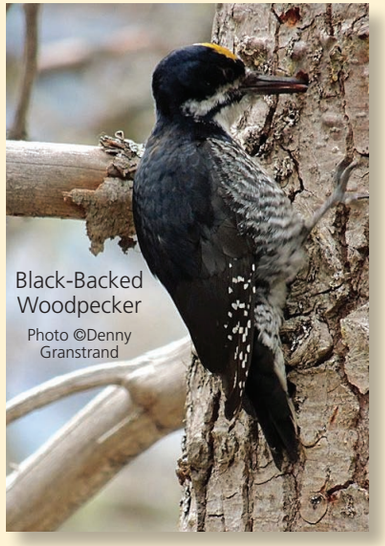
Many birds of prey need snags for nesting, roosting, and perching. These birds are important for controlling rodent populations in many areas.


American Kestrel
Photo ©Paul Bannick

Woodpeckers are one of the most beneficial animals. Through their pecking behavior, they eat wood-boring insects that other animals cannot access. They also create cavities used as homes by hundreds of animals. Unfortunately, some woodpeckers are now rare due to fire suppression and human activities.


American Marten
Photo ©Kevin Lucas

Cavities in snags and logs are den and roost sites for bats, squirrels, and rare forest carnivores.


Black-Backed Woodpecker
Photo ©Denny Granstrand

The diversity of animals that use snags is truly astounding, and includes ducks, bluebirds, wrens, chickadees, swallows, swifts, woodpeckers, eagles, nuthatches, squirrels, fishers, bats, martens, chipmunks, bees, owls, and falcons.


Wood Duck
Photo ©Tom Kogut


Red-Breasted Nuthatch
Photo ©Tom Kogut