

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
National Park Service

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INFORMATION CIRCULAR

Suggestions for a Generalized Snag Removal
Policy Designed to Protect Wildlife

The following suggestions have been prepared by the Wildlife Division, Branch of Research and Education, in collaboration with the Branch of Forestry for the assistance of those who are engaged in jobs for snag thinning and removal in national and State park areas in order to carry out fire hazard reduction with a minimum adverse effect upon wildlife:

The frequent necessity of undertaking snag removal for fire protection is fully recognized, and it is felt that, because of widely varying local conditions, decisions as to the extent and nature of removal operations can best be made by those who are actually on the ground.

Dead snags are a natural component of every forest, whether virgin or recently burned. They provide food and nesting sites for many species of birds and for some of the mammals. For some species they provide the majority of the food, and practically the only possible nesting sites. Although local conditions vary so widely that it is impossible to be specific as to the minimum desirable number of snags, it may be estimated roughly that over extensive burned areas any reduction to less than one suitable snag per acre will cause a marked reduction of wildlife, and in many areas even such a number will be quite inadequate. It is recognized, however, that in the case of areas supporting stands of Douglas fir, or stands of mixed conifers, it may sometimes be necessary, for the sake of fire protection, to eliminate all snags in a strip along truck trail right of ways, ridges or firebreaks.

Snags with large stick nests in them should always be spared if possible, because birds building such nests usually belong to a rather rare species whose habit it is to return year after year to the same nest. If the nest site is destroyed they may desert the area entirely.

Snags with nesting holes in them should be left if at all possible, and should not be cut between May 1 and August 1, since young and eggs may be destroyed.

Snags 15 inches or more in diameter are usually of more value to wildlife than are those of lesser diameter.

Snags reaching well above the undergrowth (usually 30 to 50 feet high) are usually just as valuable to most forms of wildlife as snags 20 or more feet high and, of course, constitute much less of a fire hazard.

Douglas fir or pine snags are more valuable to wildlife than snags of cedar or tamarack (Larix sp.) Cottonwood snags are considered to be low

in fire hazard as well as desirable for wildlife; the true firs, on the other hand, are particularly troublesome from the standpoint of fire hazard.

Snags with all or some of the bark on are more valuable than those which are deeply charred into the wood over most of their surfaces.

The following birds are largely or wholly dependent on snags for food or nesting sites or both: Blue Heron; Wood Duck, Barrows Goldeneye, American Merganser, Hooded Merganser; Pigeon Hawk, Sparrow Hawk; Barn Owl, Spotted Owl, Barred Owl, Saw-whet owl, Screech Owl, Pygmy Owl; Vaux Swift; Hairy Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, White-headed Woodpecker, Three-toed Woodpecker, Pileated Woodpecker, California Woodpecker, Redheaded Woodpecker, Lewis Woodpecker, Flicker; Crested Flycatcher, Ash-throated Flycatcher; Purple Martin, Tree Swallow, Violet-Green Swallow; Titmouse, Chickadee, Nuthatch; Creeper; Bewick Wren, House Wren, Eastern Bluebird, Western Bluebird, Mountain Bluebird. A great many other birds use snags occasionally.

Of the mammals, the Flying Squirrels and some of the Bats are absolutely dependent upon snags, while many other forms, such as Raccoons, Ringtails, Martens, Fishers, Gray and Red Squirrels, Wood Rats and White-footed Mice make extensive use of them.

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