

Managing deadwood for nature to enhance biodiversity, ecosystem functions, and resilient forest management

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Deadwood, including standing and lying dead trees, logs, snags and stumps; is a crucial habitat for many species and a key element of healthy, resilient forest ecosystems. In managed forests and small woodlands, deadwood has historically been removed through sanitary logging, safety concerns and production-focused management, reducing biodiversity, simplifying forest structure and weakening ecosystem functions such as nutrient cycling and natural regeneration.

Active deadwood management involves deliberately retaining, creating, and diversifying deadwood during regular forest operations. Increasing and diversifying deadwood enhances biodiversity (e.g. supports saproxylic insects and provides nesting habitat for pollinators), improves soil moisture retention, and strengthens forest resilience to drought, storms and climate stress. It also enhances carbon storage and habitat continuity. This is a low-cost, low-input practice that can be integrated into routine thinning and harvesting without reducing long-term productivity.

Practical Recommendations

- Retain large logs, standing dead trees and habitat trees where safe; do not remove all deadwood during forest operations.
- Leave selected low-value trees as habitat trees and create high stumps during harvesting.
- Maintain a diversity of decay stages and a mosaic of sun-exposed and shaded deadwood to maximise habitat diversity.
- Consider safety and pest risks when deciding what to retain and where.
- Integrate deadwood targets into forest planning and monitoring to balance biodiversity, safety, and production objectives.

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