

HABITAT TREES

WHEN DEAD WOOD MATTERS

When should a dead tree be left standing?

Standing dead trees and down wood can provide nesting cavities, shelter, insects, and structure. The right decision balances habitat value with the likelihood that a tree could strike people, buildings, roads, utilities, or important access routes.



A snag can be valuable habitat when its location, condition, and likely fall zone are compatible with safe use of the property.

● EVALUATE THE SETTING

START WITH CONSEQUENCES

A habitat tree is not appropriate everywhere.

- ✓ Map homes, driveways, gathering areas, utilities, roads, and trails.
- ✓ Consider height, lean, roots, decay, broken tops, and the likely fall zone.
- ✓ Give high-use and high-consequence locations the most conservative review.

● RETAIN USEFUL FEATURES

LOOK FOR WILDLIFE VALUE

Dead wood contributes more than an empty trunk.

- ✓ Favor sound snags with cavities, loose bark, perches, or visible wildlife use.
- ✓ Keep a variety of diameters and decay stages where space allows.
- ✓ Retain down logs and coarse wood where they will not create unacceptable fuels.

● MONITOR AND ADAPT

CONDITIONS CHANGE

A tree that is acceptable today may not remain so.

- ✓ Recheck after storms, fire, root disturbance, construction, or rapid decay.
- ✓ Move paths or targets when that preserves habitat without adding exposure.
- ✓ Use a qualified arborist or forester when defects or consequences are uncertain.

✓ START HERE

- ✓ Identify every potential target within reach of the tree.
- ✓ Observe cavities, bark, top condition, lean, roots, and wildlife use.
- ✓ Decide whether retention, shortening, relocation of a target, or removal best fits the site.
- ✓ Record the tree and set a date for the next review.

▲ THE RAVEN WORKS PERSPECTIVE

Habitat value and safety are not opposites. Thoughtful forestry keeps dead wood where it can do ecological work, removes or modifies it where consequences are high, and revisits the decision as the tree changes.

Keep habitat intentionally. Manage targets carefully. Reassess over time.

Sources: Colorado State Forest Service forest-wildlife and stewardship guidance.

○ IN THE FIELD

Three practical realities help guide snag decisions:

LOCATION LEADS

The same tree may be acceptable in a remote patch and unsuitable beside a home or road.

SIZE ADDS VALUE

Larger trees often offer deeper cavities and longer-lasting structure—but also a larger fall zone.

DECAY NEVER STOPS

Storms, insects, fungi, and root changes can quickly alter stability and risk.