

SNAGS

NATURE'S APARTMENT COMPLEXES

A snag is a standing, dead or dying tree. It is often missing the top and most of its smaller branches.

Snags are “nature's apartment complexes”, because they provide critical habitat for many species. The decomposing wood is soft enough for cavity excavating species to make entrance holes and cavities.

CAVITY USERS

- Most species that use cavities from snags are birds and bats, but other mammals such as squirrels use cavities as well.
- Primary excavators, such as woodpeckers, excavate the cavities for feeding. They peck away at the snag to reveal insects to eat. These insects also break down the dead wood.
- Secondary cavity users use existing cavities for several purposes, including feeding, breeding, nesting, shelter and food storage.
- Snags are essential habitat for the pileated woodpecker, the largest woodpecker species in North America.
- Pileated woodpeckers create many cavities used by secondary cavity nesters, and other woodpecker species excavate cavities as well. In some areas, cavities created by pileated woodpeckers are used by 80 other species.



Pileated Woodpecker by Gerald Romanchuk



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WHAT EALT IS DOING

Due to habitat loss, there are fewer areas where cavity users can find what they need to survive.

EALTs conservation lands are prime real estate for wildlife, and include many snags. Protecting these natural areas ensures that cavity dependent wildlife can find the shelter and food that they need.

To enhance the habitat for wildlife, we also install nest boxes on our conservation lands to provide cavity nesting species with more opportunities to raise their young.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

- If you have trees or a forested area on your land, you can help maintain healthy forests and habitat for wildlife by allowing snags to form and fall to the ground. Whether standing or after they have fallen, trees can provide important habitat for wildlife.
- Build and install a nest box for birds. If you live in the city, install a nest box for chickadees; if you live in the city outskirts or in a rural area, find out what other cavity nesting species are in your area for which you can provide a nest box. In the Edmonton region, these include northern saw-whet owls, bufflehead, common goldeneye, tree swallows, bluebirds, northern flickers, chickadees, wrens and others.
- Support the Edmonton and Area Land Trust to provide more homes for wildlife through conserving natural areas with snags, and enhancing habitat with nest boxes.

LIFE OF A SNAG

How long a snag remains standing depends on many factors, including its size, species, and climate. Some large conifers can remain intact for up to 100 years, while aspen and birch decay more quickly and break down within 2 – 10 years.

Even after a snag has fallen to the ground, it continues to serve an important role in providing food and shelter for wildlife as it decays.

