

The Value of Deadwood **Rance Scott Harmon Penn State**

Forest Resources Extension UNIVERSITY PARK (Centre

Co.) — Most of us recognize the importance of living trees: they provide wildlife habitat, oxygen, timber, beauty, and many other assets. However, a common belief is that when a tree's vigor deteriorates, so does its ability to provide benefits. In fact, my American Heritage Dictionary defines deadwood as "anything burdensome or superfluous" — certainly not the qualities of something a landowner would want to have around.

However, dead and deteriorating trees are actually vital elements of healthy forests; they release nutrients, prevent erosion, store moisture, protect seedlings, and supply food and shelter for wildlife. Despite their importance, the number of dead and dying trees in many forest lands has declined due to timber salvaging, fire prevention, firewood cutting, and worker safety regulations. Good forest stewardship, then, requires us to consider both living trees and deadwood as vital, interacting components of the forest ecosystem that we can manage to meet sustainable forestry objectives.

As a tree's health deteriorates, it begins to lose the battle against invading organisms and the wood becomes weaker and softer ideal for the work of cavity excavators such as woodpeckers. Many wildlife species use tree cavities for sanctuary against predators, extreme temperatures, and unfavorable weather conditions; and for nesting and brooding. Cavity nesters play a signifi-

cant role in forest ecosystems by preying on harmful insects and helping to disperse seeds.

not only provide cavities but also are favorite perching sites for flycatchers, hawks, and cats. Along the water's edge, snags are excellent places to find perching kingfishers, ospreys, and bald eagles. Nuthatches and some bats and salamanders use spaces between loose bark and tree trunks for roosting. Woodpeckers and grouse produce audible reminders of the importance of deadwood for wildlife by using the resonant qualities of deadwood for drumming — a communication technique used to indicate territorial boundaries and attract

Wood ducks, bluebirds, wood-

peckers, owls, chickadees, squir-

rels, raccoons, bats, and mice are among the 35 species of birds and

20 species of mammals that use

Standing dead trees (snags)

tree cavities in Pennsylvania.

Dead trees retain their ability to benefit wildlife and contribute to forest health even after they fall to the ground. Downed, decaying wood provides cover, foraging habitat, and egg laying sites for salamanders; and secure winter travel corridors and thermal protection for small mammals and mustelids, such as weasels. Twenty-three species of amphibians and reptiles take refuge in decaying wood in the northeastern United States, including box turtles, salamanders, and snakes.

By providing habitat and nutrition for organisms such as tungi, centipedes, beetles, and ants - which, in turn, provide food for larger animals such as skunks, bears, and woodpeckers deadwood plays a key role in forest food webs. Besides directly benefiting wildlife, deadwood plays an important role in forest health by promoting soil fertility. As they decompose, rotting logs slowly release nutrients that help nurture future tree growth and prevent erosion by holding soil in place. The branches and tops of fallen trees help enable the regeneration of forests by protecting new tree growth from animal browsing.

Woody debris also plays a critical role in aquatic environments. Logs and branches that fall into steams and rivers help diversify habitat by creating deep pools, shady areas, and shelter. Consequently, aquatic habitats with sufficient woody debris support a greater variety of fish, invertebrates, algae, and other organisms than habitats devoid of woody debris. Besides habitat, logs can protect stream banks and lake shores from erosion and trap leaves, which, together with deadwood, are the major source of nutrients and energy for small streams.

In conclusion, good forest stewardship involves regarding dead and deteriorating trees as vital elements of healthy forests to manage for sustainable forestry objectives. For more information about deadwood, request the free publication, Pennsylvania Woodlands Number 7: Deadwood for Wildlife from the Forest Stewardship Program by calling 1-800-235-WISE, sending e-mail to RNRext@psu.edu, or writing: Forest Stewardship Program, Forest Resources Extension, Pennsylvania State University, 7 Ferguson Building, University Park, PA 16802.

The Pennsylvania Bureau of Forestry and USDA Forest Service, in partnership with the Penn State's Forest Resources Extension, sponsor the Forest Stewardship Program in Pennsylvania.

National No-Till

Conference Slated For January

BROOKFIELD, Wis. — Heading into its 11th year, the National No-Tillage Conference, being conducted in Indianapolis, Ind., from Jan. 8 to 11 promises to provide hundreds of new ways to reduce costs and increase profits.

Planned exclusively by no-tillers for no-tillers, the National No-Tillage Conference features 54 no-till experts, 18 informative no-till classrooms, seven general sessions and 80 no-till roundtables in a four-day stretch. Best of all, it's all no-till, all the time, with 125 hours of intensive no-till learning

In a much-anticipated Thursday morning session, Jill Clapperton, a rhizosphere ecologist for Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada at the Lethbridge Research Centre in Lethbridge, Alberta, will explain how microscopic animals in no-tilled soils stabilize soil aggregates while helping build a better soil habitat and improve soil structure, tilth, and productivity Conference organizers have fulfilled a three-year quest to get this speaker, who has a worldwide reputation, on the

"Thursday morning speaker Jill Clapperton is years ahead of anyone else when it comes to analyzing the microbiology of no-tilled soils," said Les Seiler, a no-tiller from Fayette. Ohio. "She'll have answers for things happening in notill fields that you can't explain.'

Another session that is sure to be a hit among no-tillers is the Wednesday evening panel discussion dealing with the 2002 Farm Bill and how it's going to affect no-tillers. Four reputable notillers will take the stage, break down the effects of the Farm Bill, and answer questions dealing with this important topic.

Aside from all the valuable knowledge and networking, no-tillers also will receive six no-till books and reports valued at \$148.70.

No-tillers can also save money by registering other members of their farm at a \$50 discount. For more information on this, to request a copy cence program for yoursen or the 12-page or neighbors, or to register for the conference, contact Alice Musser at (800) 645-8455 (U.S. only) or (262) 782-4480.

Also, check out No-Till Farmer's Website, www.notillfarmer.com to find a printable file of the entire conference program and registration Major Equipment, Trk & Trl Auction

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