

Wildlife Snags

An Alternative to Tree Removal

The object of creating a snag is to preserve as large a portion of a defective tree, location permitting. The tree is meant to serve as habitat for birds and insects and to blend in with the landscape. In order for the tree to blend in, the cuts made by chainsaw should be disguised to look like a natural break rather than a saw cut.



Figure 1. A naturally occurring snag in the wild takes years to reach this stage

Species Selection

Long-lasting snags (15 years or more)

Douglas fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*),
Western red cedar (*Thuja plicata*)
Bigleaf maples (*Acer macrophyllum*)
Other maple species (*Acer*)
Oak species (*Quercus*)

Short-lived snags (Less than 15 years)

Western hemlock (*Tsuga heterophylla*)
Red Alder (*Alnus rubra*)
Bitter cherry (*Prunus emarginata*)
Black cottonwood (*Populus trichocarpa*)

Snag Height

The height of a snag is dependent on the site. It is important to remember the tree will slowly decay and fall apart. In busy locations, it is best to choose a height that will not put anything at risk as the tree slowly decays and falls apart. Based on management concerns and budget, long-lived snag species may be monitored and reduce in height again as they break down.

Snag Techniques

Birds love a perch. So, it is important not to strip a snag tree of the lower branches. Branches can be cut back, but stubs should be left to serve as perches and to mimic nature. The cut at the top is important to the look of the final project.

- Try to mimic the way trees look when they break naturally
- Many small slits in the edge of the trunk works well
- Use a small sledgehammer to break and bend the smaller pieces created with saw cuts

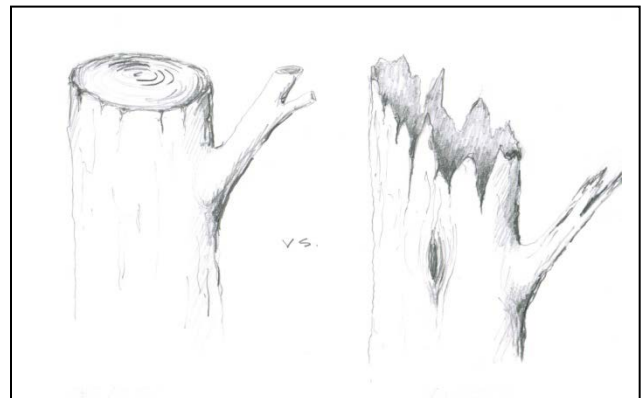


Figure 2. Ragged cuts at the end of branches and the top of the tree will look best when the tree is finished.

Snag Techniques

Bird holes form as stumps decay and woodpeckers begin to work on the decayed wood. Bats often use narrow cracks or loose pieces of bark that occur as a snag deteriorates to roost in. This process can be speeded up by cutting in a birdhouse or bat slit in the created snag. **CAUTION: these techniques require advanced chainsaw skills.** Use a small, sharp saw and extreme care.

Bird hole

- Bore a triangular “pie’ shaped piece from the trunk. Use a crowbar to pop the piece loose.
- Send the piece to the ground and cut the back off, leaving a 1-2” thick slab of wood with the bark.
- Drill an appropriately sized hole. Two northwest species that use trees are chickadee (1”) and Flicker (2.5”)
- Deepen and enlarge the hole using the tip of the saw bar
- Send the piece back up into the snag and screw or nail it back in place.

Bat slit

- Make a shallow cut upwards into the trunk of the tree.
- Use the saw to widen the cut to about ½”



Figure 3. Climber cutting in a bird hole. Note the limbs have been partially left and the top of the tree has jagged cuts.



Figure 4. Finished, artificially created bird hole.

Tree Solutions Inc. is a Seattle-based environmental consulting firm, with offices in Portland and Bend, OR. We provide a science-based, objective approach to tree evaluation and management grounded in years of experience with tree pruning and removal, land development, treehouse construction and challenge course installations. We have six highly-skilled arborists on staff and are capable of inspecting trees along courses across the United States.