



The Dead Comes to Life!

The importance of leaving deadwood in the forest

This past month, mother nature decided to drop eight inches of snow on Brewster, all at once! The following week, driving around Brewster you could not help but notice the many dangling limbs and fallen trees resulting from the storm. While many may see this mess as an eyesore or inconvenience, it is important to recognize the benefits that downed vegetation brings to the forest. BCT's protocol for fallen and standing dead trees is to leave them be if they do not pose a safety hazard to neighboring properties or designated trails. They are a critical part of the ecosystem!

Fallen trees, broken limbs, and other woody debris, otherwise known as "deadwood", are one of the key indicators of a healthy forest. Not only does this wood promote biodiversity and provide habitat, but it plays a major role in soil formation. When a tree dies, its wood slowly decomposes and returns important nutrients to the soil, allowing for other plants and new trees to grow.



Insect cavities found in standing deadwood along the Hay trail



Lichens and shelf fungi thriving on a tree snapped in half near the Hay trail

On your next walk in the woods, take a closer look at a piece of deadwood. Several types of fungi, lichens, and moss may be growing in a colorful mosaic. Another look may reveal that bugs have dug their homes into the soft bark. A larger hole may indicate a woodpecker was searching for food, and a cavity at the base may be home to raccoons, skunks, or squirrels. Without these microhabitats, biodiversity is reduced, resulting in the inability for species to thrive.

If we remove deadwood from the forest, we are removing so much more than just a chunk of "ugly" wood. A closer look and a different perspective will reveal the beauty thriving within. Of course, if a broken or fallen tree poses a safety hazard, it is important to remove it. However, if it does not pose a threat, please consider leaving it where it lies. Remember, a "clean" forest does not make it a healthy one! Leave the trees be.