

Presence of Cavities in Snags Retained in Forest Cutblocks: Do Management Policies Promote Species Retention?

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Tree cavities, which are frequently excavated by primary cavity nesters, are typically used by a number of avian and non-avian species and are thus important components in maintaining biodiversity in forest ecosystems. One way to provide these habitat opportunities in harvested areas is through the retention of snags. In this study, we assessed the habitat and snag characteristics that promote cavity excavation, using the presence of cavities to infer activity of primary cavity excavators. Snags retained closer to the forest/cutblock edge contained a greater density of cavities than trees further from edge. However, the proportion of cavities found within cutblocks declined at a more rapid rate with distance from edge than did those in adjacent forested stands. There was also a tendency for cavities to occur more frequently in trees that were at the advanced stages of decay. The results of our study suggest management for snags in harvest areas should include the retention of snags closer to the forest edge combined with incorporating trees showing signs of advanced decay.

Key Words: tree cavities, snags, forest edge, birds, mammals, reptiles, British Columbia.