

Press Release

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Don't clear out your dead trees says WWF

Gland/Switzerland -- The lack of veteran trees and deadwood in Europe's forests is a major cause of biodiversity loss, according to a report by WWF, the global conservation organization. The report, "**Deadwood -- Living Forests**" reveals that a third of forest-dwelling species rely on dead or dying trees, logs, and branches for their survival.

The removal of decaying timber and old trees from Europe's forests has led to a drastic decline in species such as insects, beetles, fungi, and lichens. Woodpeckers, bats, and squirrels which nest in hollow trees have also lost their natural habitat. Species relying on deadwood for food and/or shelter make up the single biggest group of threatened species in Europe.

According to the report, deadwood is at a critically low level, mainly due to a lack of recognition for its importance, inappropriate management practices in commercial forests and even in protected areas. In western Europe forests have on average less than 5% of the deadwood expected in natural conditions. Levels are particularly low in western Europe where compared to rare existing natural forests up to a quarter of the timber is deadwood.

"Europe's forests should be allowed to grow old gracefully", said Daniel Vallauri, WWF Forest specialist. "By stripping a forest of its decaying timber and old trees we are performing a strange and unnecessary cosmetic surgery on a natural ecosystem which threatens much of its biodiversity".

Furthermore, WWF maintains that forests with dead and veteran trees are often much healthier and resistant to disease, pests, and climate change than young tidy forests. The report outlines how deadwood keeps forests productive by providing organic matter and nutrients for trees, preventing soil erosion, and providing long-term storage for carbon, which mitigates some of the impacts of climate change.

WWF is calling on European governments, forest owners, and industry to help conserve biodiversity by increasing the amount of deadwood in managed forests, by up to 20-30 cubic metres - about 1 truckload - per hectare by 2030. It also wants an end to what it calls perverse subsidies that require the removal of deadwood, for instance after storms. The French government, for example, pays up to 2,230 US dollars (1,800 Euros) per hectare for salvage felling without any minimum guidance for deadwood.

The report is being launched in the lead up to an international conference on deadwood, attended by more than 250 forest scientists, managers and conservationists between October 25 and 28 in Chambéry, France.

"Increasing the amount of veteran trees and deadwood in forest management can make a big difference to sustaining Europe's biodiversity", said Vallauri. "We need to debunk the myths that deadwood and veteran trees mean a sick forest. In most cases it means a healthy forest with a long life cycle and a very high diversity of habitats for species."



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The report can be downloaded from www.panda.org/europe/forests

Photos to illustrate the report can be found at

<https://intranet.panda.org/photos/albums/ext/index.cfm?action=list&alid=305>