

Where do dead trees go?

Trees, like all living things, eventually die. When this happens, the energy and nutrients stored in the tree are recycled back into the environment through a process called decomposition. Without decomposition the earth would be covered with a deep layer of dead plants and animals that would never rot.

Dead and dying trees give off specific chemical signals which attract bark beetles and wood boring beetles—the pioneers of tree decomposition. These insects bore through the bark and create a network of tunnels inside the wood. Moisture and air seep into the tunnels, creating ideal places for bacteria and decay fungi. Snails and slugs crawl into the tunnels to feed on the fungi and find shelter. Through all of these natural processes, the wood of the tree is slowly consumed and its stored

energy is utilized by a variety of other organisms. Eventually, the tree becomes too weak to support itself and it crashes to the forest floor.

Decomposition is a necessary and vital process in a healthy forest. Nutrients that are locked up within dead animals and plants are recycled back into the environment providing the building blocks required for new plant and animal life.

Woodpeckers search for insect larvae or grubs inside the rotting wood.

Bacteria, fungi, and smaller invertebrates continue to feed on the organic matter that was once the log, making nutrients available to new tree seedlings growing on the forest floor.

Bess beetles, termites, carpenter ants, wood wasps, solitary bees, and millipedes tear away at the remaining wood tissue, converting it into ever smaller particles.

As the center of the log rots away, a large passageway remains making an attractive nesting site for larger mammals like raccoons and opossums.

Salamanders hide beneath the log and feast upon the numerous termites and earthworms.

Snakes find refuge under the log and lay eggs in the rotting wood.

