

# Why we leave downed trees in the Forest

This practice has been in effect for decades, but written protocol established in 2017 to address questions about the practice.

Columbus Recreation and Parks Department, Operations and Maintenance Division, Forestry Section:

## Position on leaving downed trees in forests

Mixed hardwood forests are the natural and historically dominant ecosystem of central Ohio. The City of Columbus owns and manages many valuable forested acres within a highly urbanized area. A study published in the journal *Ecology* in 2016 suggests that the best thing we can do to help a damaged forest recover is to simply leave it alone. All trees die. Dead trees are cut down or eventually fall. Fallen trees decay. There is no need to *help* out a natural process. “What appears to us as devastation is actually, to a forest, a quite natural and important state of affairs.”

The City addresses trees in a forest environment only when they become a danger to a developed trail, an adjacent recreation area, or adjacent private property where a tree coming down could be a danger to humans. In forested areas, the City leaves cut trees *on the ground* to benefit the forest ecosystem. As trees decay, their nutrients provide building blocks for future forests. Downed trees become homes and food for many organisms including plants, insects, fungi, salamanders, and small mammals. The benefits of downed trees and the natural process of forest decay, soil enrichment, and nutrient cycling are equally valuable regardless of how the tree died or was downed.

Attempts to access natural areas/forests with equipment can be devastating to natural ecosystems, so if dangerous trees that jeopardize peoples’ safety can be cut down without damaging forests with vehicles or large equipment, that is our policy. In order to maintain healthy ecosystems, felled or fallen trees remain where they land so Mother Nature can recycle the organic remains. It is a best practice in Forestry, and it is best for the long-term ecology of the precious forested land that remains in Columbus.

