

# Riparian Zone

## Dead trees in the Riparian Zone

**Habitat** - Dead trees provide habitat for a variety of birds and small mammals. Birds such as wood peckers make holes in dead and dying trees seeking insects. These holes are then used by other birds such as wood ducks as a nesting cavity. When these dead and dying trees are not available for nesting cavities we often provide bird houses as a replacement. Some birds such as eagles and ospreys use large dead trees as a place to build nests. In an environment such as the Red River, dead trees under the water provide a place for fish to hide. Fallen dead trees along the river provide a convenient perch for birds such as herons looking for fish.



**Food Source** - Dead trees provide a source of food. A dead tree is food for a variety of grubs and microorganisms. Mammals such as raccoons and birds such as wood peckers use those insects for food. In rivers such as the Red, wood under the water is an important source of food for insects. Those insects are then used as food by small fish which are then eaten by larger fish. Without wood in the Red River, we would have fewer fish in the river.



Dead plant and animal matter begins decomposition

Decomposers break down dead matter from plants and animals

### DID YOU KNOW?

A fallen tree can take up to 100 years to fully decompose and during that time of decomposition, the tree is home to millions of organisms.

When available, wood ducks will use natural cavities in trees for nesting. Their nests are typically made in trees near water but can be found up to a mile from water.

When ducklings are ready to leave the nest, they sometimes jump from heights of over 50' without injury!



**Value** - In an urban environment it is common for dead trees to be cut down and removed.

- Reasons for removal include:
- Standing dead trees may pose a hazard to humans or property if they fall down
  - They are often viewed as unsightly
  - Some dead trees can harbor diseases such as Dutch elm disease
  - Local ordinances may require a standing dead tree to be removed
  - Property owners may want to replace the dead tree with a living one
  - It seems to be human nature to want to remove them
  - Standing dead trees drop more branches than live ones
  - They don't provide shade or fruit
  - They can be utilized as firewood

Knowing the value of dead trees to the environment, this riparian area has been left in a mostly natural state.

**Nutrient Cycle** - Dead trees recycle nutrients. A dead tree was built of essential nutrients such as carbon, nitrogen, sulfur and phosphorus. When dead trees decay or are burned in a fire those nutrients are returned to the soil.

Minerals and nutrients from decomposed plant and animal matter is taken up through a plants root system encouraging plant growth

