

# FACT SHEET

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## Timber & Timber Harvesting in West Virginia

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### Forest Management and Birds

Intensive forest management activities have been criticized for the presumed effect they have on breeding and wintering habitat of birds. There isn't a lot of published scientific research, but that which is available suggests the response is mixed and highly species-specific. In general, net changes in bird abundance following timber harvesting is negligible. In other words, when one species declines in abundance, another increases; consequently, there seems to be no clear cut way of using silviculture to develop and maintain a higher avian (bird) biodiversity than naturally occurs.

The available literature indicates that the most obvious influence on birds are changes in forest stand structure and woody species composition. It also shows that there are many more studies on birds and forestry in clear-cut units than in individual or group selection units, probably because clear-cutting has nationally been the most used way to harvest timber.

The scientific literature clearly indicates the importance of snags and trees with cavities, crevices, cracks, large limbs for perching, etc. This, unfortunately, is not in conformance with current OSHA regulations which considers most such trees as "danger trees" and mandates that they be removed in the interest of logger safety. Nevertheless, snag creation and retention is probably the most commonly listed management recommendation for bird habitat.

One comprehensive review\* of technical articles on forest-bird relationships indicates that forest management activities, in most cases, do not result in community wide bird declines. Instead, the review concluded that "managed forests support abundant, rich, diverse and productive bird communities." Personal observations in West Virginia indicates that this is also true for this State. It's important to remember, however, that this statement is a generalization. Specific examples of the seemingly opposite situation is that pileated woodpeckers and the brown creeper are associated with closed canopies and large diameter snags and thus have to move from areas being clear-cut. Conversely, the house wren and the dark-eyed junco flourish in disturbed forests.

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\* National Council for Air and Stream Improvement, Inc. (NCASI). 2001. Accommodating birds in managed forests of North America: A review of bird-forestry relationships. Tech. Bull. #822, Research Triangle Park, NC, NCASI.

The NCASI review (see footnote), the most thorough technical evaluation to date, indicates that forestry “cannot be categorically described as beneficial or detrimental to birds.” The dozens of studies cited in the review show few differences. Also, there are studies that report bird abundance, species richness, and species diversity to be greater in logged forests than in comparable un-logged tracts. As might be imagined, there are also published statements that reports the opposite. However, in no way are managed forests the “biological deserts” that some have proclaimed them to be.

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