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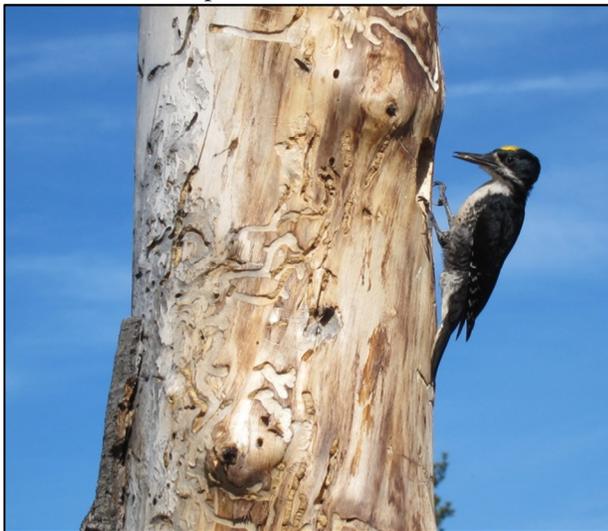
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Snag Density and Black-backed Woodpecker Nesting in Burned Forests of the Sierra Nevada, California

Black-backed Woodpecker (*Picoides arcticus*) densities are generally greatest in areas of recently burned forest. This cover type is relatively rare, highly dynamic, and subject to degradation by fire-suppression and post-fire salvage programs, so there is increasing concern about the management and conservation of the species.

This concern has been illustrated recently with the U.S. Forest Service's selection of the species as the indicator that a sufficient number of snags have been retained in burned forests of the Sierra Nevada, and by the species being considered for listing as threatened or endangered in California by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife.



To enhance the management of woodpecker nesting habitat, we investigated the nest-tree preferences of black-backed woodpeckers in two large (6,000–26,000 ha) burned areas in the northern Sierra Nevada, California. Black-backed Woodpeckers preferred nest trees that were dead but not highly decayed. There was no evidence they preferred nest

trees with broken tops, of a particular size, or particular species. Snag density around nest trees was far higher than around randomly selected trees.

We propose that the best strategy for protecting black-backed woodpecker habitat is to maintain large patches of high snag densities. Given the current controversy surrounding salvage logging on public and private land in the Sierra Nevada, there is an immediate need for more information about how snag densities at larger spatial scales, patch-size thresholds, and landscape composition (e.g., fire severity mosaics and distance to unburned forest) influence habitat suitability for Black-backed Woodpeckers.

Main Points

- Black-backed Woodpeckers nested in areas with high snag densities and avoided areas with low snag densities.
- The best strategy for protecting Black-backed Woodpecker habitat is to maintain large patches of high snag densities.
- There is an immediate need for more information about how snag densities at larger spatial scales, patch-size thresholds, and landscape composition influence habitat for woodpeckers and other wildlife.

Paper citation:

N. E. Seavy, R. Burnett, and P. Taillie. 2012. Black-backed Woodpecker nest tree preference in burned forest of the Sierra Nevada, California. *Wildlife Society Bulletin* 36: 722-728. PRBO publication #1887.