Dead Trees

River Keepers

This tree by the riverfront is used by many birds for food.

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 my 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

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Dead trees in the river provide habitat for bugs, fish, birds and turtles. Credit to River Keepers.

In nature, dead trees perform several functions including:

- Providing habitat for a variety of birds and small mammals. Birds such as woodpeckers 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.
- Dead trees may provide a source of food. A dead tree is food for a variety of grubs and microorganisms. Mammals such as bears and birds such as woodpeckers use those insects for food. In 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 we would have very few fish in the river.
- 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.
- Trees that fall into the Red, and remain connected to the shore, slow down the water flow. Slower water allows sediment to be deposited downstream of the tree, thus rebuilding the bank. Slower flow also reduces erosion.

The ash tree in front of this sign was examined in the fall of 2007. Several large cracks were located in the trunk which made the tree likely to fall in a large wind. As it fell it probably would damage the power line wires running near the tree.

In the spring of 2008 the branches of the tree were removed. Removing the branches killed the tree and reduced its height. It no longer would hit the power lines if it fell. Removing the branches also reduced the trees wind resistance further reducing its chances of blowing over.

Knowing the value of dead trees to the environment, Living Lab staff in conjunction with trained foresters, decided to allow the remaining trunk to stand for several more years. As it slowly decays it will serve as a food source and hopefully provide natural nesting cavities for birds. Over time we can all watch the changes occurring in the tree.

RIVER KEEPERS