

Wildlife Tree Stewardship Program (WiTS)

Our goal is to Identify and Protect Wildlife Trees
and their Associated Habitats

Answers to Commonly Asked Questions

What is WiTS and who is involved?

WiTS is a stewardship program of BC Nature (The Federation of BC Naturalists). Our steering committee is made up of representatives from the Federal Government - Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS); the Provincial Government – Ministry of Environment (MOE) and BC Nature. We work with a network of volunteer naturalists to collect information about wildlife tree locations that are used for nesting birds. We quality assure the information and then have it available to the public and to municipal planners and persons making decisions on development issues. We are actively working on data sharing agreements with more and more administrations and are encouraging Provincial Best Management Practices around nest trees.

Who are the volunteer monitors/stewards?

Many wildlife tree monitors are members of BC Nature or local naturalist clubs. Some are homeowners or interested persons that watch a nest near where they live.

What kind of information is collected?

Volunteer monitors collect information on the locations of Wildlife Trees and the success or failure of nesting birds using these trees. In the early years of the program, emphasis was on sites which support Bald Eagles and Osprey as they are protected year-round under Section 34 of the BC *Wildlife Act*. More recently, nest sites of all other raptors, owls and some woodpeckers have been added to the data base. Future efforts may include other bird species, bats, and other mammals that use Wildlife Trees for nesting or as dens.

How will this information be used?

Information collected on each identified wildlife tree is placed in a database that is displayed through a computer web-based Wildlife Tree Atlas. Information is made available to local government planners to be used in decision-making processes around land development. Landowner information is maintained as confidential and will not be accessible to the public.

How many nests are monitored by each volunteer?

Volunteers may monitor as many nests as they choose. Some follow just one nest that is near their home. Others have a route that takes them by several nests. Volunteer monitors can choose their level of involvement and can cut back or add more sites as they wish. WiTS coordinators help each monitor to decide their level of involvement and support them in their efforts.

How often does the monitor visit the wildlife tree?

Under the WiTS program, monitors observe the nest tree at least three times a year, once during each of the critical nesting periods of egg incubation; chick rearing; and fledging. Some monitors that can view a nest from or near their home, make many more observations.

Without agreed upon arrangements for entry onto private land, WiTS monitors make their observations from vantage points at a distance.

*****IMPORTANT NOTE TO MONITORS*****

In order to minimize disturbance during the nesting period monitors are encouraged to be as careful as possible during observation sessions. Monitors should not be approaching the nest but should be doing observations from as far away as possible with telescopes and binoculars.

Some species and even individual birds may have a much lower tolerance to human activity and may need a farther viewing distance. Watch the birds for signs of disturbance. If they start calling, or leave the nest as you approach, make note and increase the viewing distance. If more than one person is viewing a nest, stay close together. Birds will quickly get much more nervous if observers are in more than one location.