



Tales from a  
**Sisters Naturalist**  
by Jim Anderson

**The Ponderosa Pine Brewery**

The welfare of the wildlife community is tied directly to dead trees.

Pine chipmunks can't make it without dead trees to forage on, live in, and hide from predators. It's the same story for northern flying squirrels, and ALL the woodpeckers and other birds, bats, a wide variety of arthropods, mushrooms and the essential building blocks of a healthy forest ecosystem — they're found in wildlife trees (WLT).

Not enough can be said about the values of WLT in a forest community. I have a photo showing a northern flying squirrel peering out at me from its home in an abandoned woodpecker cavity, checking out the WLT sign I was attaching to an old dead tree some designate as a "snag" — only good for firewood.

Back in the glory days of logging, timber fallers of the Brooks-Scanlon Timber Company — who once had a magnificent lumber mill in Bend, and a sizable camp in Sisters — were paid 50 cents

each to fall them, as they were considered a threat to timber operations and a fire hazard.

Today we know that several species of migratory bats use abandoned woodpecker nest cavities and the loose bark on a WLT for a day roost. Native small owls, such as the northern pygmy, western screech, northern saw-whet and the wandering flammulated owl (which travels between Panama and Central Oregon annually) use the tree cavities for a place to hide and for nesting.

Douglas's squirrels, yellow pine chipmunks, and tree voles will also use empty cavities for their homes. And the species of woodpeckers that utilize tree cavities in WLTs cover our smallest — the downy — to the largest — pileated — woodpeckers, along with the signature woodpecker of the Deschutes National Forest — the white-headed. Birders from all over the world come to Sisters to place that woodpecker on their Life List of Birds.

Take a look at that bunch of pine chipmunks all over the big, old ponderosa WLT. I found that tree back in the mid-'70s while I was employed with the Forest Service as a seasonal wildlife tech. Part of my job was identifying and marking WLTs on the Fort Rock District of the Deschutes National Forest.

The soon-to-be-a-snag came to my attention as I was slowly driving through an old-growth ponderosa stand way down in the southeast end of the district. What

caught my eye was the abundance of wildlife running all over it and when I looked up, the dead branches way up near the top. The tree was, from my guess, post-clear-cut days of the '20s and '30s, shot-to-death by someone who was using the silviculturist tag for a target.

There were at least 50 pine chipmunks running all over the tree, and as I got out of the pickup for a closer look, five or six red-napped sapsuckers flew off (and I thought a Williamson's was among them). On the back side of the tree a white-headed and two downy woodpeckers flew off, and as I continued around the tree, a northern flicker yelled at me as it flew off.

"What's the big attraction?" I asked myself. As I got closer, I saw it. There was a light yellowish fluid slowly seeping from sapsucker wells, and the pine chipmunks were going nuts over it. Being curious, I went over for a closer look. Even though I was only inches away, it wasn't until I put my nose an inch from the last chipmunk before it scampered that I got a hint.

A familiar scent wafted into my nostrils as I went for a closer look, and upon impulse, I stuck out my tongue and got a small slurp of the fluid. It tasted just like White Lightning! No wonder everyone was so happy and so bold to be visiting that tree, it was the Ponderosa Brewery of the Fort Rock District.

My theory was the tree was dying, and as it did so,



PHOTO BY JIM ANDERSON

Of all the breweries popping up in Central Oregon, this is the only "natural" one I know of, with yellow pine chipmunks living it up on the squeezins!

photosynthesis was slowing down and all the fluid the tree took up was now slowly obeying gravity. However, sap going back into the soil was a slow process, and as the fluids seeped down they mixed with natural sugars and other elements — and perhaps began to ferment in

the heat of day and cold of night into a very tasty brew.

In any event — however the cocktail got into the tree — everyone that came into contact with it not only quenched their thirst, but found another value of a WLT in the Deschutes National Forest.

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