

HIGHSTUMPING....WHAT AND WHY?

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When my wife Johanne Riddick and I bought our 40 acre forest in 1987 we made note of a handful of unusually shaped Ponderosa Pine trees and have since done our best to protect and preserve these venerable old oddities despite the fact that they will never be of any marketable value. Their aesthetic value, providing a welcome visual respite from the classic straight and tall Ponderosa profile, was enough to insure their exclusion from any calculating forest management decisions. One in particular stood out as special. One of our neighbors told the story of shepherding sheep in our forest in his youth during the 1950's. He and his friends called this giant the "horsey tree" and used to "ride" it's bent trunk to while away the time. It became a favorite of visitors and our frequent camping groups who loved to set their tents beneath it's spreading canopy.



Unfortunately, about 8 years ago, it fell victim to a bark beetle attack and died. A couple of years later we decided we had to cut it down to prevent a potentially hazardous situation should it come down while someone camped beneath it's fall zone. It's lower 7 foot section was so wonderfully

formed that we thought we'd preserve that section and make our cut that high off the ground, forming a high-stump. So for years we continued to enjoy it's serpentine shape each time we passed by on our well worn path through our property. Two years ago we began noticing that a couple of Northern Flickers took an unusual interest in the top 2 feet of this high stump and began construction of a deep cavity. It became obvious that he/she was preparing a nest and yes, they followed through and successfully raised their young. Right next to this large cavity we also noticed a very small opening which we were able to identify as a cavity nest for a Mountain Chickadee pair. This past Spring both cavity nests once again successfully produced Flicker and Chickadee babies.



When the Flicker pair first started their cavity construction, my curiosity drove me a little deeper into Flicker lore. I consulted a very old but venerable 1936 volume of “Birds of America” to find that in some parts of the country the Flicker is called a “high-hole” or “High-holder” because of it's habit of building it's nest in a hole “near the top of a high dead tree-stub”. So it would appear that by accident we provided the perfect habitat for at least two species of bird. In addition, it is well known that the abandoned cavities of Flicker nests are the preferred nesting sites for Flammulated Owls. Flammulated Owls have been having a difficult time finding appropriate cavities of late as old snags are often targeted for cutting by our local fire wood hunters.

(https://www.jstor.org/stable/1368355?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents)

All this has lead me to the conviction that when it becomes necessary to cut down a large diameter tree (dead or alive) I will henceforth consider this experience and, if possible, high-stump it to provide much needed habitat for our feathered friends. It might even reduce the Flicker's obsession with trying to make cavity nests in our various out buildings! Another advantage to this high-stumping practice would be the inevitable toppling of the high-stump itself at which time it would become Crude Wood Debris (CWD) and become useful in the forest soil health cycle as well as helping support biodiversity. A great Win/Win opportunity!

So I can hear the question...”how do you high-stump a tree...safely?” A very good question indeed! A Google search for “high-stumping” will get you a hilarious video of a sawyer cutting a huge

tree with a monster saw at about a 6 foot height (<https://www.weedcountryadventures.com/high-stumping-a-huge-old-tree-there-it-is-thats-how-you-do-it/>)..."kids, don't try this at home!" In my case, you can see by the photo, that I only had to stand on the broad, horizontal lower section and the cut was then only chest high. The tree was also leaning significantly away from me! A cut like this is not too difficult to achieve safely if the operator is a competent chainsaw user, considers the cut carefully, rehearsing ones exit route, and is in reasonable physical shape. A more normally shaped tree would pose more serious considerations but cutting a high-stump at the highest comfortable and safe height of the chainsaw operator is within most of our abilities. Having said this, however, many of us have had our local power company send a professional crew to clear branches or large trees from our power right-of-way and in such instances a suggestion of leaving a tree high stumped can result in the desired affect. Of course, a large diameter, dead tree in the thick of the forest is best left to stand as a snag for maximum wildlife habitat, letting nature take it's course. But if such a tree had to come down, why not consider cutting it as high as safely possible for wildlife habitat? In commercial logging operations it is well known that high stumping select trees results in increased biodiversity (<http://www.metsaboard.com/Media/Metsa-Board-Magazine/Pages/High-stumps-and-retention-trees-.aspx>). Of course in such operations, large powered equipment is used and the mechanics of cutting a high stump are vastly simplified.

High stumping then, is something worth considering when conditions allow the practice to be undertaken in an efficient manner. Just another tool in a tree farmers management kit.