

## **“Dead Wood” by Sally Cureton**

Sometimes the urge to clean up our lots means clearing out all of the dead wood. Actually, what we should be doing is leaving it all in place. Snags, logs and dead woody debris are all part of a mature and healthy forest. Those downed twigs and logs provide critical wildlife habitat. Small animals use the dead wood for nesting, roosting, foraging and perching. Foxes, squirrels and chipmunks are likely to seek shelter in hollowed logs. Salamanders and small critters will use those logs as cover from predators. Insects, fungi and lichens will use them for food and shelter.

We might think it is a mess, but it really is very beneficial for the forest as a whole. Dead wood that decays in place helps to maintain the carbon and nutrients in the forest and build fertile soil. Dumping of brush and leaves around trees can have a detrimental effect on their health. The decay of these piles takes enough oxygen and moisture from tree roots sufficiently over time to actually kill a tree. So remember, it is best to leave those twigs and logs in place and help to keep your corner of the forest healthy.