The tree hit the trunk hard enough that the protective bark was removed near its base, making a wound 6 inches wide and 12 inches long. The wound in the tree attracted wood boring beetles that chewed their way into the wounded area.

A fungus grew where the beetles had made holes in the tree. The fungus continued to grow and spread up and down the trunk decomposing the tree's cambium, or living inner tissues.

By the time our tree was 260 years old, it had a weak spot in the trunk where the fungus had eaten out the middle of the tree. Carpenter ants moved into the weak spot. A northern flicker, a common woodpecker here, pecked holes in the tree to get to the carpenter ants.

10 years later, another fire burned through the area. Our tree, in its weakened condition, was not able to survive the burn. Although no longer living, the big Douglas fir remained standing in the forest for 50 years as a large snag, or standing, dead tree.

The snag of the old tree began to decompose, creating habitat for many species of wildlife. A pair of great homed owls lived in a large hole near the top of the snag. A flying squirrel constructed its den in a lower branch, and deer mice made small holes in the roots.

The roots of the snag were eaten by a root rot fungus. The rotten roots could no longer support the weight of the huge trunk. The next spring, in the first windstorm, the snag crashed to the ground and broke into several pieces.

The small pieces of the fallen snag slowly decomposed into the soil, providing nutrients for new trees and plants. The large trunk of the old tree, now rotten and decaying, laid on the ground. The old log increased the amount of dead material in the forest and contributes to an important part of the forest life cycle -- fire.