

Trail Advocates

of the Clackamas River Ranger District of the Mount Hood National Forest

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Is this bear damage?

Topic: Is this bear damage?

Author: Doug Firman

Topic Started: 11/17/2007; 1:22:44 PM

Last Posted: 11/22/2007; 1:43:33 PM

Is this bear damage?

Doug Firman : 11/17/2007; 12:22:44 PM

Reads: 181, Responses: 2 ([view responses to this item](#))

I came across this **heavily-damaged tree** last week across Elk Lake Creek from Battle Creek shelter. I'm thinking that this was the work of a bear looking for insects in this dead or dying tree. The scratches are up to a couple of inches deep in places and are as high as seven feet or so above the ground. Has anyone else seen anything like this? Any thoughts on who did this?

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Re: Is this bear damage?

Donald Presley : 11/17/2007; 2:51:31 PM

Reads: 191, Responses: 1 ([view responses to this item](#))

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It looks to me to be the work of a Pileated woodpecker. The two upper smaller elongated holes are normally what you see, but I have seen similar damage or even worse than what you have posted when they find a large colony of insects or the tree is visited numerous times . A bear could have added to or joined in the search for insects if you can find claw marks. If you ever come across a Pileated woodpecker working on a tree watch him from a distance for they don't like it when you get to close. Because the Ivory-billed woodpecker is for the most part extinct in the US, this woodpecker is the largest we have in North America and truly one of the most beautiful.

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Re: Is this bear damage?

Doug Firman : 11/22/2007; 12:43:33 PM

Reads: 225, Responses: 0 ([view responses to this item](#))

Don,

If you had not mentioned it, I would never have suspected that a bird could be capable of doing this kind of damage to a tree. I also had no idea that the pileated woodpecker was as large as it is. I was thinking in terms of the flickers I see around my place, but the descriptions I've read compare the pileated to a crow in size. Obviously, I've never seen one, but I'm definitely going to keep my eyes open for them in my future treks in the woods. A friend of mine who lives on wooded acreage near Eugene has seen them and sent me this note:

"We have occasionally seen them on our property so have witnessed their work firsthand. Not only can they really go to work on a tree they are pretty raucous (think Woody Woodpecker the cartoon). The trees they have attacked on our property have been snags of Ponderosa Pine that were somewhat punky to start and they have carved large rectangles out of the trunk similar to the one shown near the top of the damage area on the picture. Several times (once several weeks ago) I actually had an opportunity to watch the bird at work and it really went to town. There were chunks of wood flying everywhere."

I guess I was naïve in assuming that a bear would have caused that damage. I saw those two vertical strips and immediately envisioned a bear standing on its hind legs scraping the tree with its two front paws. From what I've learned since then, a bear is more likely to damage a young and healthy tree, tearing off the outer bark to get at the sap flowing in the springtime. It is not unusual for a bear to completely girdle and thus kill a tree.

It's good to know that I'm not too old to learn something new. And I find the idea of a woodpecker "going to town" on this tree a lot more interesting than my bear theory. Thanks for setting me straight on this.

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Response text:

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