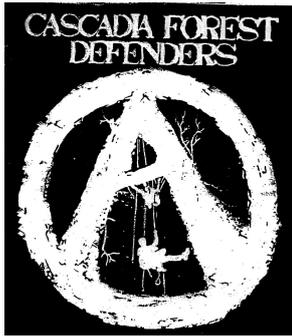


Tree Sitters



Tree-sitting is a form of nonviolent, direct-action protest where an individual or group physically occupies a tree or stand of trees by living in them for extended periods of time. The tactic is primarily employed in defense of old-growth forests, where the height of the trees matches the perceived need to protect them.

In 1985, Mike Jakubal and Ron Huber embarked on the first tree-sit in the United States. The two rock climbers had heard about Australians climbing short trees to prevent logging and decided to raise platforms into Douglas-firs at the "Millenium Grove" in Oregon's Willamette National Forest. Jakubal was arrested after one day's sit (he was caught on the ground), but Huber stayed in a tree for a month, until the National Forest Service hired a mobile crane operator to remove him. By the time the protest ended, several hundred thousand dollars were spent in increased security, time, and extraction.

Tree-sitting seldom results in changes to a logging company's plans, but it can delay tree harvesting until lawyers seek action through traditional legal mechanisms or further research demonstrates the existence of an endangered species. At the very least, the delays incurred and the cost of removing tree-sitters often make harvesting old-growth trees less profitable for logging companies.

Early tree-sits were largely impromptu events, and tree-sitters often had to come down at night to sleep. As sits evolved, platforms were used as cooking areas (complete with gas stoves); and "dreamcatchers," nets woven between branches to create hammock-like beds, served as living and sleeping areas.

Activists create "tree villages" in efforts to protect entire stands of trees by string trees together with multiple sleeping situations. Fall Creek, just outside Eugene, is the longest-standing tree village in Oregon. It has been continuously occupied since April 1998.

The majority of tree-sits in America occur in the Pacific Northwest, where the trees are tall enough to prevent the use of mobile cranes to remove tree-sitters and where some of the last stands of viable old growth exist. Although not explicitly illegal, when tree-sitters are removed from trees, usually by crane or professionally trained climbers, they are often charged with criminal trespass, disobeying closure orders, or erecting illegal structures on public lands.

Tree-sits were often used in forest defense in the late 1990s, but they have been less common since. Nevertheless, there are still several ongoing tree-sits in the Pacific Northwest; often several new sits will begin and end in the course of a summer. The practice will likely continue until new tactics are innovated or the logging of old-growth forests stops.

Written by [Matt Branch](#)

Further Reading:

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