

Dealing With Storm Damage

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Ohio woodland owners have had to deal with storm damage to their trees often in the last few years. This recent storm event (August 2024) has proven to again provide our woodland owners with a challenge in dealing with the aftermath. Let's look at some things to keep in mind when trying to figure out where to go from here.

Safety First! You will need to get into the woods to assess the damage. However, with the damage to tree canopies know that there are dangerous limbs that still have the potential to drop. Don't go into your woods alone and don't go into the woods in windy conditions. Realize that with all the debris on the ground trying to quickly leave an area will be hindered.

Get Professional Help. Our woodlands are a great mix of plant diversity, from overstory trees to understory species and they will all react to the storm damage differently. There are professionals available to help you assess the damage and create a path forward. Some of those resources include:

- State Service Foresters – these individuals are available to provide landowners with current information for the long-term management of their woodlands; provide advice on how to accomplish their management objectives, and provide landowners with technical assistance and information. They work at the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Division of Forestry.
- Private Consulting Foresters – Consulting foresters and technicians are self-employed or work for a private consulting company. They have no interest in a timber purchasing or procurement entity. They provide forest resource management recommendations and assistance to landowners for a fee. While some

consultants provide assistance with a wide variety of forestry activities, others are quite specialized.

Both the State Service Foresters and Private Consulting Foresters directories are available at <https://osafdirectory.com/>

There is also a directory of timber stand improvement/habitat improvement vendors <https://tsi.osafdirectory.com/find-vendor>. This is a list of vendors who you can hire to help with implementing practices designed to move your management goals forward.



Photo: Gabe Karns, The Ohio State University



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Assessing Damage. As you start to assess what is salvageable in your woods grab an aerial photo of the stand so that you can mark out issues and get a better sense of what and where the overall damage is. The key at this early stage is often to

- a) document all damages with lots of photos that can be referenced to the aerial photo and/or utilize a drone to get a live aerial assessment.
- b) report damages through the agency, town or county that has a disaster reporting system ready to collect information.

Some rules of thumb when looking at damaged trees are:

- Trees with less than 50% crown damage (branches and leaves) will most likely recover.
- Trees with greater than 75% crown damage are less likely to survive for any length of time. Storm damage also makes them more susceptible to insect and disease issues.
- Those trees with 50-75% canopy damage are ones that will need to be closely monitored. How they react to this damage is greatly impacted by what condition they were in before the storm event. If they were already having health issues, this crown damage may just speed up the process of decline and death.

Use extreme caution when trying to cut up storm damaged trees. Some trees damaged from the storm may be leaning, hung up or tangled up with an adjacent tree(s). Maple producers can have an additional issue with trees hung up on tubing or high tension wires. All of these situations are dangerous and can be extremely hazardous to untangle. Don't take chances, utilize professional help when necessary.

Sometimes trees are wounded from falling debris where the bark is skinned off a portion of the tree. If a tree has a wound that is more than two inches deep and affects more than 25% of the circumference of the tree's trunk, this is an opening for stain and decay. Consider salvaging the tree when removing other trees in the stand. Wounds smaller than this are typically something a tree can recover from.

Time plays a role in salvaging damaged trees. This event has occurred during the growing season which means stain and wood decay fungi will start degrading the downed trees more quickly. If damaged trees are still standing, they will not degrade as quickly, so you may have more time (6 - 12 months or more) to make some decisions.



Photo: Joseph OBrien, USDA Forest Service, Bugwood.org



Maple Producers. This most recent storm occurred towards the end of the 2024 growing season. The trees in most cases weren't dormant as of yet, but will have stored a good amount of their resources by now. However, drought conditions may have pushed the trees closer to dormancy as they shut down to conserve resources. If you were in drought conditions when this storm occurred, that stress coupled with storm damage may cause more death and decline than just the storm damage alone. Also know that while the trees have stored reserves now, next year with less crown area to produce resources there will most likely be less food reserves stored for the 2026 season. As such, more conservative tapping guidelines or not tapping at all are encouraged in the short term to help improve the trees odds of recovering.

Tapping Recommendations Based on Crown Loss	
If Tree Crown Loss Is:	Recommendation is:
Less than 10%	Tap normally
11-25%	Tap lightly - if you traditionally put two taps on trees >18" dbh consider one tap for the next few years.
26-75%	Trees are at risk. Seek professional advice. May not want to tap.
76% plus	Poor chance of <u>tree survival</u> . Seek professional advice. May tap now/salvage later.

Taxes. When it comes to income taxes, you may be able to claim casualty losses on your downed trees. All of this depends on the tax basis of your woods. The *National Timber Tax* website has more information on casualty losses here: [https:// www.timbertax.org/getstarted/casualty/](https://www.timbertax.org/getstarted/casualty/)

The Future. This is no time to abandon sound woodland management practices. The storm has damaged the woods and most likely set it back, but our woods are resilient and will recover. There will be challenges. Opening up the canopy creates a great opportunity for non-native invasive species to invade and thrive. This just means that you will need to monitor and remove these plants as soon as you can. A positive can be some great wildlife habitat in the forms of hollows in trees and brushy cover that perhaps wasn't there before. The storm may have also done a thinning for you that will allow regeneration and give the remaining trees a little more elbow room to grow and thrive.

References

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