

**STATEMENT MADE BY OWASA BOARD CHAIR GORDON MERKLEIN
REGARDING OWASA'S DRAFT FORESTRY MANAGEMENT PLAN
Presented at OWASA Board Meeting on December 9, 2010**

Introductory Comments

First and foremost, I want to make sure that the Board and public understand that staff is NOT requesting that we make any formal action tonight. In fact, in response to the comments all of us have heard, I said at the Community Meeting that I did not think it would be appropriate for us to take any formal near-term action tonight.

As a first step in the public process we approved for this initiative, the Community Meeting was, I think, in large part, a great success considering the number of people who turned out and are interested in the plan. We have learned that this issue is a very important one for many people. We will take the time necessary to ensure that we receive and consider public comments before we take any final action. I'd like to point out that early this week, staff mailed a letter transmitting this agenda item to more than 550 property owners and interested parties, and also e-mailed this information to more than 80 people.

Here's how I propose that we proceed, unless the Board thinks otherwise. First, I'd like to quickly summarize the November 30th meeting and some of the key themes we heard and staff has summarized. Second, I'd like to quickly mention what the local elected boards have done and asked us to do. I then want to suggest a couple next steps for us to consider. Once I've done that, I'd like us to hear comments from anyone here tonight that would like to speak on this matter. Following that, the Board can have a discussion and provide guidance to the staff on how to proceed.

Summary of Community Meeting

More than 150 people attended the November 30th Community Meeting, and about 40 spoke. Representatives from the NCDNR and NCWRC, as well as the Duke Forest Resource Manager also spoke and answered questions from the public. The meeting started at 7:00 p.m. and ended around 11:00 p.m.

We very much appreciate the interest in and feedback about the draft plan. We continue to welcome feedback and will consider it carefully.

I would like to thank all the staff members and fellow Board Members Amy, Braxton, Joy, and Mac for attending the November 30th meeting. Some key themes we heard from the public meeting were:

1. There are substantial concerns about impacts on water quality, the width of riparian buffers, proposed use of herbicides, etc.;
2. There appears to be an emphasis on timber harvesting rather than promoting a diverse mix of forest stands and habitats;
3. Additional baseline studies and inventories are needed;
4. OWASA should include additional agencies and a citizens' advisory group in developing the final version of the plan;
5. More time needs to be provided to allow public review and comment on the draft plan; and
6. A projection of revenues and expenditures should be prepared and made public.

Discussion By Local Elected Boards

As we know, local elected officials have discussed this matter. At their meeting Monday night, the Chapel Hill Town Council received a petition they were presented from the Citizens for Clean Water NC. The Council did not approve the petition, but referred it to their "OWASA Committee" for further review with members of the OWASA Board. It was the Council's understanding that we do not plan to act on the draft forestry management plan tonight.

Also on Monday night, the Orange County Board of Commissioners also received a petition from the Citizens for Clean Water NC. The BOCC did not approve the petition. Rather, it unanimously passed a motion requesting that we make a presentation of our draft forestry plan to the Board sometime in January 2011. The Board further requested that we delay adoption of the draft plan until after the Commissioners have time to review and analyze the plan and its contents. Similarly, the Carrboro Board of Alderman asked OWASA not to act on the plan, and to make a presentation to the Board of Alderman at a later date. We also informed the elected officials ahead of time that we did not intend to act on the plan tonight.

Suggested Next Steps

Staff will prepare a detailed report addressing all of the comments we have received and will continue to receive. That draft report will be provided in early 2011.

I suggest that one approach we consider is to have the Natural Resources and Technical Systems Committee review and revise, where appropriate, staff's initial draft responses to the comments before it is submitted back to the Board. The Committee could provide recommendations for consideration by the Board. We would then provide direction to the staff, consultant, and others about how we have considered the responses to the comments and the Committee's recommendations.

Of course, we will continue to keep the public informed about this including opportunities to provide input.

Invitation for Public Comments

At this time, I would like to ask anyone who wishes to speak on this item to come forward. If you spoke at the Community Meeting or have provided your comments in writing to us, we want you to know that your comments will be fully considered as we go forward, so please don't feel that you need to restate your comments here tonight if you already submitted them.

Board Discussion / Closing

As I mentioned previously, my suggested next steps are that we allow the staff to prepare a report addressing all the comments that have been received and that they get back to us in early 2011.