

ORANGE WATER AND SEWER AUTHORITY
SUSTAINABLE FORESTRY MANAGEMENT PROGRAM
June 2018

PURPOSE: To provide information about OWASA's plans and efforts to sustainably manage about 2,400 acres of OWASA-owned forest land, most of which is in Orange County.

BACKGROUND: In accord with the Federal permit issued for the Cane Creek Reservoir, OWASA is required to implement the NC Wildlife Resources Commission's (WRC's) plan for managing the forest resources on our 490-acre Cane Creek Reservoir Mitigation Tract. The WRC prepared a forestry management plan for the tract in 2009. Our forestry management consulting expert, True North Forest Management Services, subsequently developed an approach and schedule for implementing the WRC plan, which was approved by the WRC and then by the OWASA Board on March 25, 2010.

STATUS: Active management of the forest resources on the Mitigation Tract began in Fall 2010. In October-November 2010, about 25 acres of that tract were clearcut, and about 25 acres of upland hardwood forest were thinned (lower quality trees were removed and the higher quality trees were left). The clearcut area was replanted in loblolly pines (on 10'x10' spacing) in February 2011. An access road and stream crossing were installed in 2013 to implement the WRC plan on the south side of the Mitigation Tract. In August-November 2014, approximately 34 acres of pine were clearcut over ten small areas; the largest clearcut area was 8 acres. In addition, approximately 200 acres of forest were thinned, and the highest quality trees were left standing. In 2015, contractors reseeded the logging roads and decks to prevent erosion and maintain water quality (a logging deck is a cleared area where logs are temporarily stored before they are loaded on trucks and for logging equipment to turn around). In 2016, the areas clearcut in 2014 were replanted.

Minor management work will continue on the property as needed. For example, on April 10, 2018, a prescribed burn was performed on the 24-acre hardwood section at the entrance to the property. The goal for this upland hardwood area is to promote regeneration and restoration of oak and hickory species on this site to provide food and habitat for wildlife. At an early age these two species are often out-competed by more aggressive maples, sweetgum, poplar, pines and other woody vegetation which do not provide the same long term wildlife benefits. Oak and hickory saplings are more resistant and adapted to fire. They have a greater ability to survive a fire because they have a better established root system than these other species. The fire will select for the oak and hickory and dramatically change the species composition to one that favors these two species.

Strategic Initiative 6 of the Board of Directors' [Strategic Plan](#) is to develop a plan and policy framework for long-term management of OWASA lands. One action identified is to develop a long-term plan for sustainable management of OWASA forest lands; management could range from no active management to comprehensive management that includes a variety of forest management activities. As a first step in addressing this initiative, staff presented the Board of Directors with an overview of OWASA's land holdings and past discussions on [May 25, 2017](#). At that meeting, the Board requested that staff draft a Community Engagement Plan (CEP) for forest management and present that draft plan by the end of fiscal year 2018.

Staff began drafting a CEP to present to the Board, but determined that it was important to discuss an overall approach for managing our forested land prior to developing a detailed CEP. Staff

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presented a draft concept to the Board on May 10, 2018; the Board directed the Natural Resources and Technical Services Committee to work with staff to develop the framework and CEP.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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<https://www.owasa.org/forest-management>