Meeting Summary
Natural Resources and Technical Services Committee
December 12, 2018, 4:00 p.m.

Committee Members:	John Young (Chair), Bruce Boehm, Jody Eimers, John Morris,
Other Board Members:	Ray DuBose, Bob Morgan
Staff:	Mary Darr, Ed Kerwin, Ken Loflin, Linda Low, Johnny Riley, Ruth Rouse, Todd Taylor, Mary Tiger, Stephen Winters
Public:	Linda Cooper, Edward Mann III, Jim Warren

The Natural Resources and Technical Services (NRTS) Committee met to discuss a framework to manage OWASA's forested lands. John Young opened the meeting. Ruth Rouse briefly summarized the information in the agenda package. General discussion points are summarized below.

Framework

John Morris sent an email to the Committee members prior to the meeting which outlined an alternative framework (Attachment 1). His proposal was:

1. Start with the goals included in the 2010 draft forest management plans and adapt them rather than developing guiding principles from scratch. The principles would be drafted in Committee, reviewed by the Board, and discussed with stakeholders.
2. Staff would recommend 6 to 10 sites where we would see immediate environmental benefits.
3. The Committee and Board would select 6-8 tracts to develop management plans.
4. Staff would develop 3-4 specific, near-term plans that would be presented to the Committee, Board, and neighboring landowners. These would not look beyond what was the initial management as that would keep long-term options open for future Boards.
5. Staff would implement the plans.
6. We would go back and repeat the above steps incorporating any lessons learned.

Guiding Principles

The Committee reached agreement on the following regarding guiding principles:

- The 2010 goals are a good first step, but should be simplified. Simpler guiding principles allow the ability to refine them as we develop plans for specific tracts of land.
- Staff should consider including additional guiding principles concerning fire risk reduction, ecological health of the forest, and carbon capture.
- Guiding priniciples should not be prioritized, with the exception that protecting water quality should be the top priority with any forest management plan.

Proposed Sites for Management

The Committee thought that staff's initial list of 6-10 sites for management should include a range of potential issues and illustrate different guiding principles and benefits.

Near-term versus Long-term Plans

There was some discussion about developing short-term versus long-term plans. The Committee felt that stakeholders would likely be interested in hearing about long-term plans, but also understood that deferring long-term planning kept options open as the state of forest management science changes. The Committee thought that multiple long-term management activities should be included in the plans to reflect that we may not presently know the best future management option.

Stakeholder Engagement

Several points were made regarding stakeholder engagement:

- Stakeholders include both OWASA's customers and neighboring land owners.
- The above process does not yet address community engagement; that process will be developed once there is agreement on the framework.
- Some Committee members felt there should be no engagement on the guiding principles as they will be vague. More specific goals for a given stand could be based on the broader guiding principles with neighboring landowners.
- Stakeholders present indicated that reducing fire risk was important to them and also suggested that stakeholder involvement begin early.
- The engagement process needs to be carefully thought out.
- One goal is to end up with plans that most stakeholders agree to.

Other Discussion

Several Committee members did not agree with the 2010 goal that forest management should be revenue neutral. We need to manage our forest land as we do our other assets and that may cost money. They acknowledged that we need to consider costs and also include funding for forest management in the annual budget.

Next Steps

The Committee identified the following next steps:

1. Obtain Board agreement on a revised framework that staff will develop based on the Committee discussion; staff will present this to the Board at its January 10, 2019 work session.
2. Staff will draft guiding principles based on the Committee discussion and provide those to the Board at its January 10, 2019 work session.

3. Upon Board agreement with the framework, staff and True North Forest Management Services (OWASA's consulting forester) will identify 6-10 tracts of land for management and present those in a future NRTS Committee meeting.

4. Upon Board agreement with the framework, staff will develop an approach for engaging the community on forestry management and present that at a future Board meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 5:30 PM.

Prepared by:

Ruth C. Rouse

Ruth Rouse, AICP
Planning and Development Manager

Attachment 1: Email from John Morris to NRTS Committee Members and Staff on Forest Management at Cane Creek dated December 7, 2018

From: John N. Morris
Sent: Friday, December 7, 2018 11:56 PM
Subject: Forest Management at Cane Creek

To NRTS Committee members and OWASA Staff:

At our NRTS meeting on December 12 we will be discussing forest management at Cane Creek. I met with Ed and Ruth this week as suggested by John Young to propose a less complicated, incremental approach to forest management that I believe will get us started on long deferred management sooner, and at the same time give the public more effective participation by showing them exactly what we propose to do, rather than having a debate on abstract principles alone. We had a good meeting and appeared to be converging in our idea of how to proceed. I appreciated their time and engagement. Ed and Ruth encouraged me to send my proposals to the committee in advance, so here they are.

The materials Ruth sent out this afternoon are the same as she sent November 2 for our canceled meeting in November, and do not reflect our discussion this week. In any event, at our meeting next week we can look at both approaches and Ed and Ruth can explain their current thinking.

The agenda materials sent out for the May 25, 2017 Board meeting explain the need for forest management on OWASA land at Cane Creek clearly and convincingly:

> **Staff Recommendations for Forestry Stewardship**
> Staff recommends that we proceed with forestry stewardship on all our forested land. While there will likely be opposition to adopting and implementing Forest Stewardship Plans that involve active timber management on our lands – especially watershed land – staff believes we have an obligation to be good stewards and to follow best practices for managing our lands in perpetuity. Properly managing our land assets will promote healthy forests, prevent disease and infestation, and reduce fire risk, thereby assuring long-term water quality protection. OWASA is committed to providing the public meaningful opportunities for review and comment on future draft Forest Stewardship Plans prepared for any OWASA lands, and we will consider that feedback before final adoption and implementation of such plans.

I would only add to this statement that good management can also greatly improve wildlife habitat.

This same agenda item includes six goals for forest management that were developed in 2010:

OWASA developed the following goals which were presented to the Board of Directors in 2010 for its forest stewardship program:

- To protect water quality (including, at a minimum, compliance with the riparian buffer protection requirements in the Jordan Lake Rules (50 foot riparian buffer with the inner 20 feet being forested).
- To establish and maintain adequate riparian forest buffers to serve as an effective filter for runoff and prevent sedimentation of streams and other surface waters.
- To enhance forest conditions for wildlife health and species diversity and abundance by creating a forest of diverse habitat types and conditions.
- To minimize impacts of forestry management activities on adjacent properties.
- To improve, restore and enhance the overall quality of OWASA-owned woodlands through a long-range program of managing the forests in accordance with sound, science-based silvicultural practices.
- To generate revenue through the sustainable harvesting of timber to meet the above objectives, with the goal of having long-term forestry program revenues equal or exceed the costs to develop, implement and maintain OWASA's Forest Stewardship Plan.

These goals were thoughtfully developed by the staff and our contract forester. They are still a sound basis for our forest management, and include the purpose of improving wildlife health and species diversity.

During our recent tour of the Cane Creek area, we saw two sites, both primarily stocked with pines, one planted in straight rows by OWASA and one naturally seeded on old fields with a few more hardwoods mixed in. Our forester explained that at both sites the pines are too crowded, which is slowing growth. A first thinning (neither site has been thinned) would take out appropriate rows of trees, giving the remaining trees more light and improving their health and growth. Thinning would also open up some of the forest floor to sunlight, allowing green plants to grow that would provide wildlife food and cover. In both cases there is good access from a paved road and impacts on neighboring land owners appear to be minimal. We should ask our staff to help us identify a small number of such priority sites for management for review by our committee. Ruth points out that we should also include sites where problems such as fire danger, storm blowdown, or beetle infestation make them priorities.

When we settle on a small number of priority sites for management, we should get public comment on these specific actions, along with the guiding goals listed above. This approach allows the concerned public to see exactly what we are planning to do, much more likely to give us useful comments than debating general principles, which individuals will interpret in different ways.

In planning public consultation, we need to think clearly about who our stakeholders are. The primary stakeholders are our water users and rate payers, who will want us to assure protection of the reservoir and will support recovering the cost of forest management. Individual adjacent landowners around Cane Creek are secondary stakeholders because of potential impacts of forest management on their property and amenities. We will communicate with them to let them know what is planned and to minimize our impacts on them, including making individual contacts.

As we plan for public comment, our announcement should stress that we are taking a very different approach than we did in 2010. Instead of presenting a whole complicated notebook of a hundred or so tract plans covering decades into the future, we are proposing a small number of management items which are described in detail so they can be understood. We will be inviting comment on these specific actions. We will also only be recommending near term actions. Decisions about management decades from now can be left to future leaders, who will need to take unpredictable changes in such important factors as climate, forest health, and community preferences into account as they make these future decisions.

Forest management is basically maintenance of a resource according to well understood scientific forestry principles. It lends itself to a series of incremental steps, where we start with the most urgent or beneficial projects, learn from our experience, and adjust our plans as we monitor our results. Trying to approach it through Board adoption of a long term master plan is not necessary and will take too long, as well as being much harder to communicate to the public.

I suggest these steps:

1. The NRTS Committee should go over the goals of forest management listed above with our staff and our consulting forester to make sure that we are happy with them or to amend them as needed. We do not need to start over on goals, but can rely on the product we already have to start with.

2. The NRTS Committee should work with our staff and consulting forester to pick a small number of initial priority management projects as outlined above. The Board should then review our goals (with any needed changes) and the proposed forest projects to assure that we all understand and support our recommendation.

3. The public should be invited to comment on our goals and on the selected management actions. Landowners living near the selected projects should be approached individually to minimize impacts on them to the greatest extent possible. At the beginning of any public meeting on forest management, we should have our forester or other appropriate expert explain the benefits of the actions we are recommending and the precautions we are taking to protect water quality. For example, 26 percent of the OWASA land around Cane Creek has been set aside for protective stream buffers where no forest management will occur. All forest management will be carried out according to proven best management practices to protect water quality.

4. After considering public input and modifying our direction as appropriate, the Board should authorize the selected management projects to begin.

We can anticipate that there will be some opposition to our plans. Some believe that cutting any tree is wrong. Others may fear that the reservoir will be harmed. We will need to explain carefully the technical basis for our recommendations. In the case of resuming fluoridation and of the radio emissions from new meters, we heard public objections respectfully, but decided to follow the most widely accepted scientific information that the benefits of these actions were great and that there were no significant negative effects. In the case of forest management, after hearing from the public and making any changes in our plans that are needed, we should be resolute in pursuing the good management and protection of the resources entrusted to us.

I am looking forward to working together with you on this important resource management responsibility.