Proactive Forest Renewal: Enhancing Oak Forests and Wildlife Habitat at Lafayetteville Multiple Use Area

Location: Stands A-24, A-25, and A-26 (Visible from Route 199)

Project Goal: Oak Forest Regeneration & Wildlife Habitat Enhancement

Overview

The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) is beginning a forest management project on approximately **92 acres** of the Lafayetteville Multiple Use Area.

What Residents Will See

In the short term, the forest will look open with downed branches and tops left on-site. This appearance is a biological necessity for creating dense young forest cover that many native species require. We encourage residents to watch the site over the coming years as it transitions into a vibrant, thicket-rich young forest full of new growth. Harvesting will use designated access to minimize disturbance.

Why are we doing this?

Our local forests have faced a "perfect storm" of stressors, including recent droughts and spongy moth activity, leading to significant mortality in mature trees. In some areas, between 40% and 70% of the tree canopy has been lost or is in a state of decline from these events.

- **Regenerating the Oak:** Red and chestnut oaks are **keystone species** providing acorns essential for wildlife. Faster-growing trees like birch, maple, and ironwood are currently outcompeting young oaks. This project resets the balance to favor oaks.
- **An Opportunity:** Reduced deer numbers due to Epizootic hemorrhagic disease (EHD) has reduced browse pressure in certain regions allowing for a “pulse” of regeneration to become established in some areas like Lafayetteville MUA. Inventory indicates current seedling densities between 2500 and 5400 per acre. This project presents a unique opportunity to release these young seedlings before deer numbers recover and browse pressure begins to impact their viability.
- **Safety & Resilience:** Removing dead/dying trees now creates space for vigorous new trees better suited to future climate challenges.

The Shelterwood Method

This is a **Shelterwood Harvest**:

- **Parent Trees:** The healthiest oaks remain as shelter and seed sources for the next generation.
- **Sunlight:** Pre-harvest inventory shows that an average of approximately 100 mature trees per acre occupy the project area. This harvest will be removing about 20 of those trees per acre. The goal will be to increase the sunlight necessary for acorn germination and to "release" thousands of oak seedlings already waiting in the understory.
- **Habitat Creation:** This produces a **"Young Forest"**- a rare and critical habitat for songbirds, wild turkeys, and up to 60 *Species of Greatest Conservation Need*. Young Forest and Shrubland | a fresh way to create wildlife habitat
- **The New England Cottontail:** A key beneficiary, this native rabbit thrives in the thick shrub and seedling patches this project creates for predator protection.

Our Commitment to Conservation

Designed by DEC Foresters to the highest standards of environmental protection:

- **Dual Green Certification:** New York's State Forests are independently certified by the **Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI)** and the **Forest Stewardship Council (FSC)**. This ensures our management meets the most rigorous global standards for biodiversity and social responsibility. State Forest Certification - NYSDEC
- **Wetland & Water Protection: Special Management Zones (SMZs)** maintain higher canopy cover near wetlands for shade, temperature regulation, and soil protection.
- **Professional Standards:** The harvest will be conducted by a **TLC (Trained Logger Certification)** certified logger to ensure the implementation of best management practices and minimal site impacts. New York Logger Training |
- **Structural Diversity:** Downed woody debris is left on-site intentionally to recycle nutrients and provide nesting and "escape cover" for wildlife.
- **Strategic Alignment:** This project follows the **Strategic Plan for State Forest Management**, a science-based blueprint that has undergone full environmental review to ensure long-term ecosystem benefits. Strategic Plan For State Forest Management - NYSDEC

Economic and Community Benefits

Sustainable forest management supports New York's wood products industry and local economies. Through a competitive public bidding process, the forest products from this site were sold to a local sawmill for **$23,668.23**. Timber Sales on State Forests - NYSDEC

Because New York State Forests are **Green Certified**, the forest products from this project are recognized globally as a premium, sustainably harvested product. This certification adds value to the local wood supply chain, supporting regional jobs and businesses that rely on verified sustainable sources. **Proceeds from this sale are deposited into the New York State General Fund**, contributing to the state's ability to fund essential public services.

By addressing these impacts proactively in the spirit of our Strategic Plan and third-party "Green" certifications, we ensure Lafayetteville remains a healthy, diverse, working forest for people and wildlife for generations.

For more information, questions, or to arrange a site discussion, contact:

Senior Forester Matt Paul Phone: 845-256-3156 | **Email:** matthew.paul@dec.ny.gov