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Buffer Interpretation/Clarification #2007-015

MEMORANDUM

Background: In the table of uses in the Neuse River Basin Buffer Rule 15A NCAC 02B.0233(6), the Tar-Pamlico River Basin Buffer Rule 15A NCAC 02B.0259(6), and the Catawba Buffer Rules 15A NCAC 02B.0243(6), there is a provision for pruning vegetation under "vegetation management" that is considered exempt, provided the health and function of the vegetation is not compromised.

Problem: There is no clear definition or concise guidelines in the above-mentioned buffer rules to explain how to prune and what pruning truly consists of, nor is the issue of mowing addressed.

Solution:

Pruning should always be performed primarily for safety, then for the health of the vegetation, and lastly for aesthetics.

Specific pruning guidance for various vegetation types is as follows:

Pruning is defined as the removal of dead tree branches or live tree branches with a diameter of less than 10 centimeters (3.94 inches). If a branch being removed is greater than 10 centimeters (3.94 inches), it is no longer considered pruning. Branches greater than 10 centimeters (3.94 inches) in diameter should only be removed when the branch is a safety issue.

Pruning for Deciduous Trees: If pruning must be done on deciduous trees, then it should only be performed **once a year during the dormant season or immediately following an "act of god" situation, such as a hurricane or ice storm that causes tree damage.** Dead branches on trees can be removed any time.

(http://www.na.fs.fed.us/spfo/pubs/howtos/ht_prune/prun001).

Pruning for Coniferous Trees: Conifers may be pruned any time of year, but pruning during the dormant season may minimize sap and resin flow from cut branches. Dead branches on trees can be removed any time.

Pruning for Shrubs: According to Dr. Barbara Fair, Assistant Professor in the Department of Horticulture Science at North Carolina State University, an acceptable way of pruning shrubs would involve the selective removal of branches while maintaining the natural shape of the plant. Small branches that do not conform to the natural shape of the shrub can be removed as needed. Cutting the branches of a shrub down to its main trunk is not a selective removal of branches and could compromise the plant. If shrubs are pruned properly, it should not be obvious.

In addition, no pruning of shrubs should be done that could potentially compromise the vegetation by reducing the organic matter collection or removal of the buffer's ability to reduce soil loss during flooding, as there would be no top growth to slow the flow of water.

Mowing of Grasses, Weeds and All Other Non-woody Vegetation: These can be mowed in Zone 1 of the protected riparian buffers **only if** the lawn has been continuously mowed prior to the applicable buffer rules. Zone 2 can be maintained lawn provided vegetation in Zone 1 and diffuse flow through the buffers is not compromised.

Signature: _____

Date: _____