

## MEDIA RELEASE

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**CONTACT:** Heather Norris  
PIO  
ONWASA  
[hnorris@onwasa.com](mailto:hnorris@onwasa.com)  
(910)455-0722



O: 910.937.7532  
F: 910.347.0793  
onwasa.com  
228 Georgetown Rd  
Jacksonville, NC 28540

### **ONWASA REPORTS ON DAMAGE, SEWER BYPASS IN SWANSBORO AND SEWER UPSET IN HOLLY RIDGE, SEEKS HAZARD MITIGATION FUNDING FROM FEMA**

During a Special Meeting of the ONWASA Board of Directors on Tuesday, October 2<sup>nd</sup> the board received reports from staff and engineers on damage to the system during Hurricane Florence, including a sewer bypass and upset in Swansboro and Holly Ridge. Damage and emergency cost estimates have fallen from an initial \$10 million in estimated damage to approximately \$6.7 million.

ONWASA's facilities across the service area sustained damage during the historic rainfall and flooding event of Florence. The most significant damage occurred at the Northwest Water Reclamation Facility off of Gum Branch Road near Richlands. This catastrophic plant failure has been the primary concern of ONWASA during the utility's ongoing recovery efforts. Other wastewater plants sustained minor damage that has been fully repaired. Nevertheless, there were two instances in which wastewater has been determined to leave the plant in some method other than the approved discharge. The State of North Carolina has been fully briefed on all plant issues and the repair and recovery efforts that transpired.

On September 14<sup>th</sup> one of the three effluent pumps at the Swansboro Plant stopped working for approximately 90 minutes, until it was repaired on-scene. An estimated 5,000 gallons of fully treated wastewater from the end of the treatment process bypassed the discharge and flowed into Foster's Creek.

On September 16<sup>th</sup> rain at the Holly Ridge plant caused partially-treated wastewater to overtop an approximate 10-foot area at the rear of a wastewater pond just prior to conclusion of treatment in the ultraviolet system. An estimated 72,600 gallons of partially treated wastewater flowed into the uninhabited woods behind the plant before stopping approximately 13 hours later. The pond berm was not harmed in the overflow.

Within the water distribution system, there were 14 major washouts of water lines and dozens of lesser breaks or leaks that had to be repaired or isolated. ONWASA lost an estimated 10 million gallons of pure drinking water through various main breaks in the system. Within the sewer distribution system 4 of 72 lift stations flooded with less than 3,500 gallons of sewer spillage from the entire collection system.

ONWASA is actively pursuing hazard mitigation grants from FEMA that will create berms around critical facilities, or borings under stream crossings to prevent future damage by natural disasters. In addition, ONWASA staff have contacted USDA Rural Development to seek additional hazard mitigation assistance following Florence.

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