

EWEB aims to build resilient, habitat-friendly water storage in Southeast neighborhood

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Clean, high quality and reliable drinking water consistently ranks highest in importance to EWEB customers. The utility is making significant investments to ensure we continue to meet those needs and expectations by improving the resiliency of our water storage systems while supporting healthy habitat and public spaces. One of the first areas to see major activity is a 10-acre property off East 40th Avenue in South Eugene. The lot has been largely undisturbed since EWEB purchased it in the 1950s. But next year it will be put to its intended purpose when a 7.5 million gallon (MG) water storage facility is constructed on the northeast side of the property.



The new tank will be partially buried and have vegetative screening to blend in as much as possible with the existing landscape. “Our goal is to enhance the safety, reliability and resiliency of our community’s drinking water, while designing a space that fits the neighborhood and aligns with broader community needs,” said Laura Farthing, Senior Civil Engineer and Project Manager.

Construction will begin mid-2021 and last approximately two years. Long-term plans call for a second tank on the site, but a timeline has not yet been developed for that work. New water storage tanks are one of several investments EWEB is making to ensure that we can meet critical community needs in the event of an earthquake, including fire suppression and drinking water distribution points.

“As we upgrade aging water storage infrastructure, EWEB is moving toward a distributed water strategy-- replacing the large (15-20 MG) tanks at College Hill and Hawkins Hill with 5-6 smaller (7.5 MG) tanks, including the two tanks at East 40th,” said Laura. “The reason for this strategy is resiliency – moving from consolidated to distributed drinking water storage mitigates the risk of losing all our water in a major disaster.”

Deer, turkey, birds and other wildlife are common at EWEB water storage sites throughout Eugene, and especially in the south hills. The property at East 40th is fairly unique as it is home to increasingly rare oak savanna habitat. EWEB is seeking advice from an ecological consultant on how to best preserve and support sensitive species during construction and restore the site to enhance the habitat afterwards.

“We are committed to retaining as much natural space as possible, including the trees along the ridgeline and the larger oaks,” said Laura. “The results of the ecological survey will help us with facility placement and other design and construction plans.”

The utility has been communicating with the 40 or so neighbors who live directly adjacent to the property since last February. Preserving natural areas, site security, and construction impacts like noise and heavy truck traffic are common concerns. EWEB will develop and share a Construction Mitigation Plan and Southeast neighbors will have opportunities to give input on landscape design options. The utility expects to hold neighbor meetings later in the year to share more specific details about the project, preview landscape renderings, and collect public input.

Learn more about water storage improvements and join EWEB’s mailing list for project updates at eweb.org/waterstorage.