

Forest Succession

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Forest succession refers to the natural process by which the composition of a forest changes over time due to disturbances such as fire, flooding, land clearing, or tree harvesting.

For example, pine plantations, created and managed by humans, represent an early stage in forest succession, which can lead to more diverse forests. Pine species may dominate cleared fields or disturbed areas due to their rapid growth in full sunlight and potentially barren soil. Over time, the pines may be replaced by more shade-tolerant hardwoods, such as oak, beech, and hickory. A mature forest with a mix of species is known as a climax forest.

Part of succession includes tree loss and a change in flora and fauna. For example, when a tree dies, the "snag" becomes habitat for mammals, insects, and birds. Some species, like woodpeckers, choose dead trees to make their homes with an insect dinner right outside the door! Pioneer species appear in the clearing, both native and invasive species. New growth is based on seeds resting in the soil until they are disturbed and germinate, a process known as the "seedbed." During the Autumn season, a careful observer can see examples of forest succession in the variety of leaf and flower colors.

References:

Duke Forest Succession

<https://dukeforest.duke.edu/forest-environment/forest-succession/>

Welcome to the Woods! A Guide for New Virginia Woodland Owners

<https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/ANR/ANR-136/ANR-136.html>

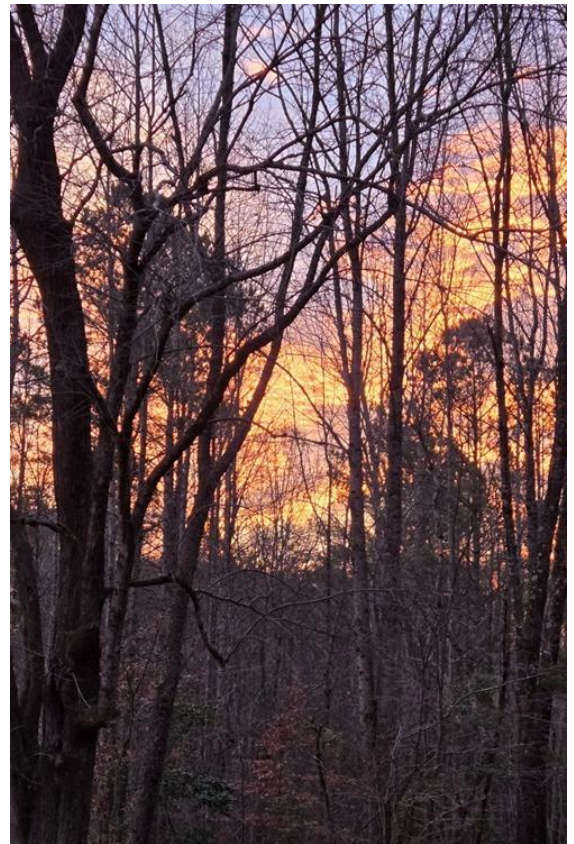


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