

Report of the Land Trust Committee - 10/2/96

Summary of current status of land trust/conservancy pursuit.

We have been exploring the avenues that FWW might pursue to further the possibility that White's Woods will continue as a nature park . As a result of individual background reading, several discussions between members of the committee and our 17 September meeting with the Westmoreland Conservancy, we have concluded the following:

(1) We might attempt to broker a transfer of White's Woods to the IUP Student Co-op Association, Indiana County or IUP or some other entity that inspires more confidence than White Township. This option would require easements that guarantee continued public access and place severe limits on further development of the park. However, some legal entity must be invested with the obligation to monitor the easements and assure their enforcement. If the new owners are Indiana County, perhaps the voters might serve as the monitoring body. However, IUP or the IUP Student Co-op are not structured for this type of self monitoring.

(2) We might attempt to obtain the ownership of White's Woods from the White Township Supervisors. We could then

a) go into the "park business" with the all the legal rights and obligations associated with this move or

b) we could (perhaps after some length of time) deed the property over to another entity (IUP Student Co-op, Indiana County, IUP). The need for monitoring any easements placed on the property would exist as for option (1).

(3) We could encourage the White Township Supervisors to pass an ordinance that places the same restrictions on White's Woods as would the easements noted above.

(4) We can leave things as they are. This assumes that the White Township Supervisors are now, and will continue to be, supporters of the concept of preserving White's Woods as a nature park.

Option (1) will probably not be satisfactory unless FWW is the legal entity that monitors the easements. Option (2) likewise requires that we acquire legal status. Thus both options (1) and (2) require that we incorporate and obtain 501 (c) (3) [tax exempt] status(at a cost of approximately \$500) . Option (3) would likely entail a long political battle and of course, any law can be reversed by the passage of a subsequent law. Option (3) would not provide very secure

guarantees. Option (4) does not inspire confidence (we know that as of last year, the Supervisors were **not** supportive) unless FWW or an organization with similar goals (NWW?) continues into the future. It is hard to see FWW continuing very long without a "program" or a series of activities to generate interest. It is hard to estimate how long we could continue as a quiescent organization that monitors the political winds and has the ability to reactivate as threats to White's Woods develop.

One final thought. The above discussion has assumed that if a land trust is advisable, FWW would fill that role. This would represent a major shift in the emphasis of FWW and with every shift we lose some original supporters (and perhaps gain some new ones). It might be best to form a separate land trust organization. FWW and the new organization would work closely with regards to White's Woods, but while FWW might continue to focus on activities related to White's Woods, a land trust organization might be interested in the preservation of the county's natural heritage through the acquisition and/or protection of other parcels of land.