



# Friends of White's Woods Monthly Newsletter



## Nov. 22nd Webinar to Explore Pennsylvania Big Trees

Pennsylvania has some very big and tall trees. Some are out in the open, while others are hidden deep in sheltered forests.

The Nov. 22nd free Zoom webinar from noon to 1 p.m., sponsored by Friends of White's Woods, will explore where some of the largest and tallest trees are found in Pennsylvania, how big trees in White's Woods compare to other known giants, and how we measure the trees.

"A Brief Tour of Some of Pennsylvania's Big Trees and How to Measure Them" will be conducted by Dale Luthringer, the environmental education specialist for Cook Forest State Park. Luthringer has explored big trees in Erie County and elsewhere and has explained "witness" trees – a tree that is both old and supposedly saw a historic event, such as the large, old trees in Antietam in Maryland, which "witnessed" the Civil War battle there.

Originally from the Erie area, Luthringer was a farmer for nine years, a Marine Corps sergeant and a furniture maker. After his four years with the Marines, he earned an associate of science degree in wildlife technology from Penn State-DuBois and a bachelor of science in applied ecology from Clarion University.

The recipient of the 2022 Conservation Stewardship Award, Luthringer creates and leads teacher workshops and environmental education programs, with about 18,000 attending each year. He also conducts various forms of ecological research on topics such as acid mine reclamation, white-tailed deer



*Dale Luthringer, the environmental education specialist for Cook Forest State Park, will share what he learned about White's Woods big trees at the Nov. 7 free webinar.*

West Nile virus, old-growth forest documentation, National Audubon Society SAPs, Pennsylvania Herpetological Atlas, Pennsylvania Breeding Bird Atlas, gypsy moth suppression, and hemlock wooly adelgid, among others. Luthringer also organizes various community educational and volunteer events such as the Woodsy Owl Workday, the Cook Forest Big Tree Extravaganza, and the Cook Forest French & Indian War Encampment.

To register for the free webinar, which runs on Zoom from noon to 1 p.m., please send an email to [info@friendsofwhiteswoods.org](mailto:info@friendsofwhiteswoods.org).

## Barberry Removal Update

The Summer 2024 National Parks Conservation Association's lead article was titled "[Weeding the Grand Canyon.](#)" The article described volunteer efforts to patrol the banks of the Colorado River through the canyon and beat back invasive plants.

If they can do it, we can do it!

In the 15 months that FWW, with the support of White Township, has been working to remove Japanese barberry from White's Woods, volunteers have collectively worked about 650 hours (and counting) to remove between 20,000 and 40,000 plants. Where does that estimate come from? Those of us who count everything can tell you that we pull about 100 small to medium plants per hour. The larger bushes can take quite a bit longer. So, we have removed at least 20,000 plants. It is quite reasonable to guess that we've removed double that.

Our initial goal is to remove the invasive barberry from the center of forest up to the ridge tops. We are not there yet. But we have made noticeable progress. All of the areas in which we've worked so far are likely to show some re-growth of new, small barberry plants that we will have to remove next year and in the years following. The plants are only a few inches tall. It is light work! Fast work! In the early spring, the barberry is easy to identify: It is the only green plant in the woods! You can help! If at all possible, plan to pitch in for a couple of hours in late March or early April to remove the new, small plants.

In the meantime, if you can help us in our last-of-season work on some of the bigger barberry patches in the woods, please do. Email [info@friendsofwhiteswoods.org](mailto:info@friendsofwhiteswoods.org) to let us know that you can help.

### UPCOMING EVENTS

**Nov. 5: U.S. Election Day. VOTE!**

**Nov. 22: A Brief Tour of Some of Pennsylvania's Big Trees and How to Measure Them** webinar by Dale Luthringer, DCNR Environmental Education Specialist, Cook Forest State Park, noon to 1 p.m.

**March 27: Public Land Priorities in the Latino Climate Justice Framework** webinar by Olivia Juarez, Public Lands Director, GreenLatinos, noon-1:00 p.m.

**Barberry Removal in White's Woods** is happening every week, often both mid-week and Saturdays. Please email [info@friendsofwhiteswoods.org](mailto:info@friendsofwhiteswoods.org) if you can spare an hour or two to help.

**Catch the FWW Naturally column monthly in the Indiana Gazette.**

Please check [friendsofwhiteswoods.org/events](https://friendsofwhiteswoods.org/events) and/or your email for up-to-date information on upcoming events. Register for webinars by sending an email to [info@friendsofwhiteswoods.org](mailto:info@friendsofwhiteswoods.org)

**For more information, visit: [friendsofwhiteswoods.org](https://friendsofwhiteswoods.org)**

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# Indiana and Little Brown Bats

## Prove Essential to Healthy Ecosystems

In the process of developing the [2023 Draft White's Woods Stewardship Plan](#), White Township requested that the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) coordinate a [Pennsylvania Natural Diversity Inventory \(PNDI\)](#) for the White's Woods Nature Center (WWNC). The PNDI assesses the presence of threatened, endangered, and/or special concern species in the assessed area.

The PA Game Commission and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service identified White's Woods as a potential foraging and roosting habitat for endangered bats. To protect bat habitat, according to their 2023 WWNC report, the forest canopy should be protected, large snags (dead trees) should be left in place, and caution should be taken with pesticide use.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has identified the federally endangered Indiana Bat as within the WWNC's range; the PA Game Commission also lists the Little Brown Bat within the WWNC's range as endangered in Pennsylvania.

These bats hibernate in caves, tunnels, or mine shafts. [According to the PA Game Commission](#), "[i]n Pennsylvania, hibernating Indiana bats are most often found mixed in among little brown bats, possibly due to low statewide numbers causing them to use little browns as surrogate roosting partners." In spring, the bats emerge and forage for insects. The maximum migration distance to summer habitats is estimated to be 320 miles. Little Brown bats and Indiana bats roost in big hollow trees or under loose bark.

An adult Indiana bat is 3½ to 5½ inches long with a wingspan of 9½ to 10½ inches. The Little Brown Bat may be a little smaller, with a wingspan of 8 ½ to 10 ½ inches.

Habitat loss, pesticides, human interference (particularly during winter hibernation), wind turbines, and, most recently, a nearly always fatal fungus, White Nose Syndrome, are factors responsible for the precipitous decline in bat populations.

Why care about bats? The [USFWS](#) explains that bats are important animals for our ecosystems and are key to insect control, plant pollination, and seed dispersal. "Across all agricultural production, consumption of insect pests by bats results in a savings of more than \$3 billion per year."

The 2021 Indiana County Natural Heritage Inventory explains that the loss of any species poses a threat to any ecosystem. "If a species becomes extinct or is lost from a portion of its native range, the ecosystem in which it lived will lose an important element. Often, the repercussions of extinctions are not known until the species is gone, and the species is generally irreplaceable in the system. This may be because the habitat has been altered to the point that the biological system no longer functions properly. . . Beyond these practical considerations, perhaps the most compelling reasons for stewardship are the aesthetic and ethical considerations; there is beauty and



Indiana Bat



Little Brown Bat

recreational value inherent in healthy, species-rich ecosystems."

According to the USFWS, [there are many things that we can and should do](#) to protect bats, including turning off lights at night to provide the dark environment bats need; avoiding pesticide use in your yard so that bats will have insects to eat; leaving dead and dying trees where possible so that they can serve as bat roosting sites; install a bat box; if you need to remove a bat from your house, do so humanely and without injuring it. Globally, bats, like other mammal populations are declining. Fortunately, conservation efforts are underway, and we can help.

Identification of the endangered, threatened, and/or species of concern in White's Woods is not complete. Threatened and/or special concern reptiles, amphibians, birds, and plants have been confirmed in our forest but are not on official lists. We are working on the documentation. If you can help document any threatened and/or species of concern in White's Woods, please email [info@friendsofwhiteswoods.org](mailto:info@friendsofwhiteswoods.org).

### Climate Forests Coalition Update

[Over one million citizens](#) provided feedback to the U.S. Forest Service Draft Plan to protect old growth in U.S. national forests, emphasizing that the draft fails to protect mature forests and incorporates too many loopholes that allow continued logging of old growth. The Forest Service is working to finalize the National Old Growth Amendment. [Climate Forests](#) is planning further action in November. Project 2025 documents indicate that the election outcome may impact the future of old-growth and mature forests.

Federal legislation misleadingly titled "[Fix Our Forests](#)," is a bill that would allow logging projects to proceed without environmental impact assessment or public review. [Opposed](#) by dozens of environmental organizations, the bill has nonetheless passed the U.S. House and is on its way to the Senate. Climate Forests urges citizens to contact their Senators.

### Annual Membership Meeting Included Information, Celebration

The FWW Board at the Oct. 15th annual meeting, provided an update regarding the status of the 2023 Draft White's Woods Stewardship Plan, which was supported by public input and approved by the White Township Stewardship Committee on May 2, and submitted to the White Township Board of Supervisors on July 24. No further action has been taken, nor has a reason been given for lack of action. White Township does continue to support elements of the plan, including volunteer removal of barberry and deer exclosure fencing. The draft plan emphasizes the role of natural succession, least-intrusive forest management, Project 70 purposes and obligations, and the need for reliance on consultants who recognize the interlocking ecological systems within a forest and the need to protect these.

Enrolling the White's Woods Nature Center in the Old Growth Forest Network and/or expanding the size of the current 43-acre White's Woods Natural Heritage Area would provide another layer of permanent protection for our community forest.

The three-year-old deer exclosure is showing much understory growth. Tree seedlings identified in the exclosure include red maple, black gum (lots), red oak, tulip poplar, walnut, as well as two seedlings that were in the exclosure area before the fence was erected: hawthorn and cucumber magnolia. Understory plants growing in the exclosure include greenbrier, Virginia creeper, and poison ivy.

Other discussion focused on the five different "communities" in White's Woods (areas that differ in light, soil, moisture, dominate tree and plant species), along with the average age of forests in every region of the United States. By every measure, White's Woods is one of the more mature forests, not just in Pennsylvania, but also nationwide. Some areas of White's Woods appear to be about 120 years old; a few trees are 200 years old or older.

The group spent identified fund-raising opportunities to support not only the annual operating budget (website, email, printing, post office box, vendor fees, memberships, newsletter, and webinar costs), but also necessary expert consultant fees and educational programming. IUP students/FWW supporters proposed a stronger relationship with the IUP student community.

FWW is looking for more volunteers to help with barberry removal, grant writing, event/table staffing, educational programming, and support of FWW webinars so central to understanding the information for the long-term protection of White's Woods.

The business portion included the re-election of board members David Dahlheimer, Fred Heilman, Jessica Jopp, and Carolyn Trimarchi for three-year terms, expiring in 2027.

Special thanks to all who joined us for this meeting!

For more information, visit: [friendsofwhiteswoods.org](http://friendsofwhiteswoods.org)  
We welcome feedback. Email us at:  
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