



[Public trust and White Township's Stewardship Committee](#)

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White Township Stewardship Committee. Photo: White Township website

White's Woods diary

By Sara King

WHITE TOWNSHIP — Members of the [White Township Stewardship Committee](#) have expressed a concern in recent meetings, most recently in [January](#): The public doesn't seem to trust them! Well, the committee process over the last year has sometimes been bumpy and even disheartening.

Consider the committee's history of trust:

Open Meetings

The public has heard committee-chair or member suggestions for the [committee to meet in executive session](#), to hold work sessions that exclude the public, and to omit [public comment](#)

[periods from the agenda](#). (All illegal and all nixed by White Township Manager Chris Anderson.)

Timbering

To the surprise of the public, among the documents provided by township staff to the committee for consideration at the [first meeting](#) in January 2022 included the [Millstone Plan](#), which had been rejected by the public and profoundly [questioned by the state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources](#). At this first meeting, township staff also suggested that **Project 70** requirements might not be anything to worry about.

The Millstone Plan called for extensive timbering to control invasive plants, although experts make it clear that [timbering dramatically accelerates invasive plant growth](#).

At a [March 2022 meeting](#), committee member Sierra Davis suggested that the committee gain public trust by putting together a statement confirming that timbering is not the committee's goal. The committee then had a [lengthy discussion](#) about the differences between clearcutting and selective timbering, the benefits of doing some timbering to enhance public enjoyment of the woods, and the possibility of using felled trees to teach young people how to build log structures.



Barbara Hague, chair, White Township Stewardship Committee. Photo: UpStreet Architects website.

[In August 2022](#), Ms. Davis once again asked the committee to let the public know that they had no intention of cutting down a lot of trees. Chairwoman Barbara Hauge said that she wasn't ready to do that.

By [November](#), the committee was tossing about ideas to commit to no “commercial timbering” or no “timbering for economic gain.” Both phrases would allow the extensive timbering as proposed in the Millstone Plan, a plan that, according to Township Supervisors, was not for economic gain.

This definition also would allow proceeds from the sale of timber in White's Woods to fund part of an amphitheater at East Pike or maintenance projects in any White Township park. Such uses are not “for economic gain,” as the profits would be used to enhance township recreation areas.

These timbering loopholes remain in committee documents still under consideration.

Model plans

In May 2022 and again in February 2023, Ms. Hauge urged the committee to review information regarding the management of [small-acreage, privately-owned woodlots](#). Committee member David Dahlheimer provided five model plans for public lands stewardship to the Stewardship Committee for review. There has been scant reference to the plans in committee discussion. Generally, goals of such plans emphasize relying on public input, protecting the tree canopy, controlling invasive plants and deer-browse, and picking up trash.

Public input

In their [March 23, 2020, letter](#) to White Township, the DCNR Bureau of Forestry emphasized that any stewardship plan must be rooted in public input.

During the 2022 stewardship committee meetings, there was much committee discussion about getting new public survey input, all the while *dismissing* consideration of the [2022 \(IUP/Boser\)](#), [2021 \(FWW\) public input surveys](#), the 100+ emails sent to the Township by citizens in 2020 and 2022, the 2020 petition with 1,200 signatories, as well as the input from thousands of additional people from 1995 to 2020.

Basic facts

In December 2022, [Friends of White's Woods](#) sent a letter to the committee expressing our confusion. White's Woods was funded by commonwealth grant monies; designated as a regional park to be used for low-density passive recreation, to be left largely in its natural state, and supported by nearly 5,000 citizens who over 27 years have taken the time to tell the township that no timbering should occur in White's Woods. But, after a year of sitting in committee meetings, the public could not be sure that the committee understood these facts.

NOW, CONSIDER the future:

Is FWW hopeful? Of course! One can't work to save a forest for over 27 years and not be hopeful!

FWW has provided the committee with a tree species inventory, as well as [native and plant inventories](#), [expert webinars](#) and contact information, information about natural succession, [a 130-page draft management plan](#) with [appendices](#) that include dozens of management recommendations, a forester's evaluations, and a portion of DCNR's at-risk species list. FWW has also gathered a dozen [sample public lands management plans](#), along with [guidelines for managing a natural area](#).



Friends of White's Woods yard sign, Indiana, Pa. June 28, 2020. Photo by David Loomis

[All 2022-2023 committee consultants](#) have emphasized that protecting the tree canopy in White's Woods is critical for control of invasive plants. Consultants have also pointed to the importance of large trees for carbon sequestration, stormwater control, and the ecological health of the forest.

Consultants have made clear that [natural succession](#) works and that the big trees in White's Woods can live for hundreds of years.

There seems to be a chance that some committee members recognize the ecological and economic value of joining the [Old Growth Forest Network](#) and of formally protecting this young, second-growth forest so that it may become old growth.

It seems that some committee members are beginning to be clear that the two problems that need attention are [invasive plants and deer-browse in the understory](#).

It is possible that committee members are beginning to understand that public natural lands should be managed by [ecological forest experts and not industrial foresters](#).

Consultants made it clear to the committee that [fencing is necessary](#) to control deer browse.

It is also true that:

The committee is beginning to recognize the importance of existing public input. They finally [began to review some of this input](#) during their 2023 monthly meetings.

There is a chance that some on the committee are beginning to understand the immediacy of the climate change threat and THE urgency of [DCNR's advice](#) to “keep the forests that you have.”

There is hope that the committee is starting to realize that working with the public at every step, in both planning and implementation of any and every plan, will not only save time, it will lead to more successful outcomes.

Such a process is used for natural area management by communities all around the U.S. It is the ideal strategy for managing community forests and building public trust. But after over a year of committee missteps, it is honestly hard to know for sure just which way we are headed.

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