



# Friends of White's Woods Monthly Newsletter



## MANAGING NATURAL AREA FORESTS IN CITIES

Natural areas account for the majority of urban parkland in the United States. However, this type of parkland is not well described, or understood at a national scale.

Dr. Clara Pregitzer, deputy director of conservation science at the Natural Areas Conservancy, will explain how the conservancy has worked with 17 U.S. cities to form the Forests in Cities Network to advance the science and practice of managing the vital forested natural areas at the Feb. 23rd webinar.

"We will describe trends, challenges, and opportunities related to urban natural areas," Pregitzer said, "and provide an overview of several resources developed by the network including a newly released Urban Silviculture Guide that connects rural forest practices to urban settings. We will also describe a catalogue of resources compiled by the network to help make the case, assess, advocate for more resources, and manage urban natural areas."

Pregitzer led the forest assessment component of the Natural Area Conservancy Ecological Assessment for NYC parkland and the development of the Forest Management Framework. She previously worked with NYC Park's Natural Resources Group conducting ecological assessments in over 1,500 acres of NYC parks. She holds a bachelor of science in forestry from Northern Arizona University, a



Dr. Clara Pregitzer

master's of science in ecology and evolutionary biology from the University of Tennessee and is pursuing a doctorate at Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies.

The Natural Areas Conservancy champions urban natural areas in New York City and across the nation through innovative research, partnerships, and advocacy in the effort to increase the health and resilience of urban forests and wetlands, catalyze connections between people and nature, and strengthen the environmental workforce.

See below to register for this webinar, which will be held from 4 to 5 p.m.



### *Have you spotted this animal in White's Woods?*

FWW President Sara King saw a fisher recently in the woods. Fishers (locally called fisher-cat, although they're not related to cats nor do they eat a lot of cats) have long, slender bodies with muscular, short legs similar to their cousins -- weasel, mink, marten, and otter. Their thick, grayish-brown to brownish-black glossy fur tends to be darker on females.

Fishers are shy and elusive animals that are rarely seen even in areas where they are abundant. They can be active day or night. They tend to exhibit nocturnal and crepuscular (dawn and dusk) activity in the summer and diurnal (daytime) activity in the winter. They remain active year round and do not hibernate.

### *Naturally Column begins run in the Indiana Gazette*

Friends of White's Woods, in conjunction with the *Indiana Gazette*, is running a monthly column titled *Naturally* that will appear one Saturday per month on the Opinion page.

The column will feature local nature enthusiasts who will write on topics such as raptors, monarch butterflies, tree species, seal salamanders and their own experiences in nature.

The first column appeared Jan. 28th. If you have a subscription to the digital version of the *Gazette* (or if you haven't used up your free articles for the month), you can read the first article at [https://www.indianagazette.com/opinion/king-white-s-woods-a-doorway-to-a-new-world/article\\_4afb6f40-71d1-5c2c-94f1-456ad-ce7eb32.html](https://www.indianagazette.com/opinion/king-white-s-woods-a-doorway-to-a-new-world/article_4afb6f40-71d1-5c2c-94f1-456ad-ce7eb32.html).

## UPCOMING WEBINARS AND EVENTS

**Feb. 16: White Township Stewardship Committee meeting.** 6:30 p.m., White Township Municipal Building.

**Feb. 23: "Natural Area Forests in U.S. Cities: Opportunities and Challenges."** Dr. Clara Pregitzer, Deputy Director of Conservation Science, Natural Areas Conservancy.

**March 23: "The Tree of Outdoor Recreation."** Nathan Reigner, PA Director of Outdoor Recreation.

**March 23: White Township Stewardship Committee meeting.** 6:30 p.m., White Township Municipal Building.

**April 20: Webinar.** TBA.

**April 22: Earth Day Celebration.** White's Woods. 10 a.m. to noon.

**May 25: "Tree Diversity Study of White's Woods."** Dr. Marion Holmes, University of Pittsburgh's Kuebbing Lab.

The webinars, offered via Zoom from 4 to 5 p.m., are free and open to the public. To register for a webinar, send an email to [info@friendsofwhiteswoods.org](mailto:info@friendsofwhiteswoods.org). Recordings of all webinars are available at [friendsofwhiteswoods.org/events](http://friendsofwhiteswoods.org/events)

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

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## **JAN. STEWARDSHIP COMMITTEE MEETING FOCUSES ON TREE DIVERSITY IN WHITE'S WOODS**

Tree diversity in White's Woods, the deer browse problem and trust issues between the supervisors and the public were key topics at the Jan. 19th White Township Stewardship Committee meeting where more than 15 residents were in attendance as well as five to 10 more residents online.

Dr. Marion Holmes of the University of Pittsburgh's Kuebbing Lab presented the results of her completed tree species inventory of White's Woods, an inventory that was requested by FWW in July 2022. Holmes noted that White's Woods has lots of variability: It has many different habitats, is dissected by streams, and has slopes facing in every direction. The photographic history of this land indicates areas of old forest along with younger forest in areas that were, about 80 years ago, agricultural fields. All of these factors, Holmes noted, play a role in forest structural diversity.

Twenty-eight species of trees were identified in White's Woods, the composition of which is what one would expect based on previous research regarding forests of this age in the Allegheny Plateau. The composition of the dense tree canopy in White's Woods varies across the forest because different habitats within the forest affect tree species diversity within that area. Overall, the canopy was largely comprised of northern red oak, red maple, and tulip poplar. Tulip poplar comprised about one-third of the canopy. In some parts of the forest, however, white oak, beech, and red oak were the dominant canopy species.

Forests change through time, Holmes noted. Some bigger trees naturally come down (gaps open in the canopy) and the diversity of the forest increases - as long as the significant deer browse pressure is kept to a minimum in these gap areas. Holmes also noted that some tulip poplars live 400 to 600 years. Holmes explained that tree-size diversity in White's Woods is special and absolutely worth retaining. Big trees are very important to a forest.

Dr. Sara Kuebbing, research director of Yale University's Applied Science Synthesis Program, called attention to the native and invasive plant species inventory that she and Holmes prepared in October 2021. (This report was provided to the Stewardship Committee by FWW last January). In White's Woods, Kuebbing noted, there is a high population and rich diversity of native plants, as expected in a forest of this type. There are some DCNR-identified "at-risk" and "vulnerable species." Kuebbing pointed out that the two challenges facing White's Woods are the same two challenges currently faced by forests all across the eastern United States: deer-browse

pressure and invasive plants. In studies where deer fences have been erected, dramatic growth in the forest understory of native plants and trees is apparent.

Observing that White's Woods is certainly far from a completely-invaded forest, Kuebbing listed three invasive plants of special note in White's Woods: Japanese barberry and stilt-grass, both currently held in check by the tight canopy, and garlic mustard, which may have peaked in the forest at this time.

Kuebbing noted that controlling invasive plants is a long-term, time-intensive process and argued that it is important to establish management priorities. Possible management priorities might include: establishing an early detection invasive plant watch list; developing strategies to keep new invasive plants from entering the forest; looking to other urban parks to learn about the variety of ways of managing deer browse; "beating back" some of the invasive plants already there, seeing what works and adjusting removal efforts as needed.

In other committee business, members remarked on two letters sent to them by FWW, one in December 2022 (the committee's December meeting was cancelled) and January 2023. In his remarks, committee member Matt Klunk noted that new FWW signs and attendance at committee meetings seems to indicate public fear and lack of trust in the committee. Chair Barbara Hauge registered her objection to statements that suggest that she supports timbering. She elaborated by saying that just because someone thinks that a tree should be cut down doesn't mean they support timbering. Vice-Chair David Dahlheimer pointed out that the committee had been unable to agree on a mission statement that included the phrase "no timbering," but had, in fact, recommended other language such as "no commercial timbering" or "no timbering for economic gain." Committee member Sierra Davis expressed her hope that the committee would develop a roadmap to gain public trust.

The committee re-elected officers to serve for the coming year: Hauge, chair; Dahlheimer, vice-chair; and Sierra Davis, secretary.

Appalachian Forest consultant Mike Wolf is scheduled to make a presentation at the committee's Feb. 23rd meeting. At the suggestion of Dahlheimer, the committee agreed to invite Dr. Susan Boser to make a presentation regarding the 2021 Community Interest Study at the February meeting. In a discussion of the 2020 FWW Survey, the majority of the committee agreed that the sample size in this FWW survey was admirable.

## **Attendance + Input = Democratic Process**

Attendance at governmental meetings is an indication of public interest in topics being discussed and indicative of a strong democratic process.

Take recent attendance numbers at the White Township Supervisor meetings where discussion on the need for a swimming pool ordinance (now known as the Dangerous Structures Ordinance) and the proposal for deer hunting in White's Woods resulted in public input that helped craft treatment of these issues.

The input provided to the Stewardship Committee by attendees at the meetings is meant to ensure that the committee considers key information from a variety of areas of expertise and that the views of the public serve, as DCNR indicated, as the basis for all White's Woods' management goals. After all, the plan will need to be posted for public scrutiny prior to consideration by the supervisors so listening to the research of experts and public input would make approval of the final document more likely.

One input example was in a letter FWW sent Dec. 8 to the Stewardship Committee noting that White's Woods was obtained through state grant funding and was designated as a natural area to be left largely undisturbed for passive recreation. The letter also stated that more than a dozen experts have underscored the need to protect this forest's tight canopy, that our forest is a complex set of interlocking ecosystems (not just trees!), and that 27 years of public input - input that should drive all management decisions -- is clear: White's Woods should be left as a natural area.

This letter observed that after a year of attending White Township Stewardship Committee meetings, FWW remains unclear about the committee's commitment to this information, factors, and/or concerns.

A second letter provided an update of FWW's 2022 draft management recommendations for White's Woods (White's Woods: Current Value & Future Care), offering a brief update of the overall document, urging the committee, again, to consider the document, and offering five suggestions for immediate action, including removing particularly insidious invasive plants that have not yet become well-established and joining the Old Growth Forest Network.

The mission of FWW is to preserve White's Woods Nature Center as a natural area by allowing natural succession into a mature forest. FWW's work, including work with consultants and FWW-initiated forest inventories, has made clear that our mission is consistent with best management practices for natural areas and for addressing critical problems with atmospheric carbon.

The Stewardship Committee should view this input - both from meeting attendees and research documents - in the spirit in which it is intended: to assure that the resultant plan contains the best scientific research on natural areas and reflects the desires of WWNC users.

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

**We welcome feedback. Email us at:  
[info@friendsofwhiteswoods.org](mailto:info@friendsofwhiteswoods.org)**

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