



Friends of White's Woods, Inc.

P.O. Box 1271
Indiana, PA 15701

June 18, 2024

White Township Board of Supervisors
950 Indian Springs Road
Indiana, PA 15701

Dear Chair McCauley and Supervisors Gallo, Gillette, Lenz, and Vislosky:

Friends of White's Woods (FWW) is very appreciative of the Township's process for development of the draft stewardship plan for White's Woods. This process followed Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) recommendations for maximizing opportunity for public input throughout the plan development process and for rooting the plan's goals, objectives, and implementation processes in public input, as well. The Township has been and should be applauded for this achievement.

FWW also joins the Township in celebrating the large number of citizens who took time to provide feedback to the draft stewardship plan that was posted for public review from December 23, 2023 to March 22, 2024. Two hundred and twenty responses to the plan were sent to the Township by 210 different individuals. From the many conversations that FWW has had with those who decided to weigh in on the plan, citizens took this responsibility very seriously. Short responses declaring support for the plan were as carefully considered as those who spent many pages providing punctuation and sentence structure suggestions.

What stands out in this data, of course, is that the 2023 Draft Stewardship Plan for White's Woods was overwhelmingly supported as written. Over 95% declared their support for the Stewardship Committee's draft. It is also important to note that almost 70% of those providing feedback to the plan took the time to applaud the plan recommendation to enroll White's Woods in the Old Growth Forest Network (OGFN). (See attached.)

The OGFN has been doing an extraordinary job supporting the protection of second-growth and old-growth forests in the northeastern United States and making sure that the public knows where these forests are located. Information summed in federal government research, "Smart Growth in Small Towns and Rural Communities," indicates that smaller communities with impressive greenspace are more likely to thrive - to retain existing residents and business and to attract new ones. Enrolling in the OGFN not only protects WW for future generations, it helps to protect the long-lasting health of our community, as well. It might be of interest to the Township to know that DCNR puts a high premium on the OGFN and has already dedicated 25 locations to this network.

At their May 2, 2024 meeting, when the Township's Stewardship Committee met to review all of the feedback that they had received in response to the posted plan, the committee rightly agreed that the quantitative summary of the public feedback is very important: Mr. Klunk noted, for instance, that the committee certainly would not want to make any changes that were contrary to the plan that is so wholeheartedly supported by the public. All members of the committee agreed.

It should be noted that some members of the public offered further suggestions consistent with the publicly-approved draft plan goals and objectives (such as planting native understory plants, improved signage, stormwater on trails, ADA compliance, and working with utility companies to establish "meadows" in the utility right-of-way) that could or should be considered as the plan is implemented over the coming years.

It is also of note that the committee carefully considered public input from a very small minority (1-2%) that ran counter to the majority-approved plan goals and objectives. These numerically insignificant ("outlier") comments, the committee concluded, did not present information that would justify significant revision of the carefully crafted plan that was resoundingly approved in public input.

One very important element of the White Township Stewardship Committee's draft plan are steps that the committee identified as central to successful implementation. To this end, the committee recommended the formation of a "Steward's Committee" that will work with the Township manager to support long-term care for White's Woods and assure that all future management considerations are rooted in public input. Because of FWW's extensive work in sponsoring data collection about our Nature Center (inventories of native plants, invasive plants, and tree species; identification of resident bird populations and mammals); work with widely-recognized consultants from a variety of different disciplines; successful and significant work on invasive plant removal; nature education programs; and extensive research about forests and natural areas, the committee saw the importance of making sure that FWW is part of the ongoing process for future management of our community forest. Protection of White's Woods, as well as education about our Nature Center, are central to FWW's mission and we embrace the responsibility of ongoing contribution.

The White Township Stewardship Committee expended tremendous effort in developing this plan. The committee worked with an array of expert consultants, up-to-date research, model stewardship plans, DCNR resources, as well as public input. I think that we all agree that the committee has done good and thorough work. The public recognizes the success of the Stewardship Committee. We trust that the BOS will recognize their success as well.

Sincerely,

Board of Directors,
Friends of White's Woods