



Friends of White's Woods Monthly Newsletter



Spirituality and Climate Crisis, topic for Nov. 16 webinar

The greatest moral crisis humanity has ever faced is the climate crisis.

In the Nov. 16th webinar, titled “Living on the Hinge of History: The Moral Claim of the Climate Crisis,” Rev. Jim Antal, author of *Climate Church*, *Climate World*, will examine the most recent science and the theological emergency to preserve the world.

He will identify the actions churches are taking as they seek to be faithful amidst the long emergency.

Amazon’s description of his book reads: “*Climate Church*, *Climate World* contends that climate change is the greatest moral challenge humanity has ever faced. Hunger, refugees, poverty, inequality, deadly viruses, war—climate change multiplies all forms of global social injustice. Environmental advocate Rev. Jim Antal calls on the church to meet this moral challenge, to embrace a new vocation so that future generations might live in harmony with God’s creation. After illuminating how human beings are responsible for the dangers our planet now faces, Antal proposes how people of faith can embrace new approaches to worship, preaching, witnessing, and other spiritual practices that honor creation and cultivate hope.”

Antal is a denominational leader, climate activist, author and public theologian. He serves as Special Advisor on Climate Justice to the General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ. An environmental activist since the first Earth Day, he has preached on the climate crisis since 1988 in over 300 settings and has engaged in non-violent civil disobedience on numerous occasions. His book is being studied by hundreds of congregations. It has been featured in the *Chicago Tribune*, in *Christian Century Magazine* and by the AAR. Antal is a graduate of Princeton University, Yale Divinity School and Andover Newton Theological School.



Rev. Jim Antal will lead Nov. 16th webinar.



LOCAL FOOTBALL TEAM ASSISTS WITH JAPANESE BARBERRY REMOVAL: *Friends of White's Woods received an assist Oct. 7 and 21 in the pulling of Japanese barberry, a non-native invasive species threatening the native plants in White's Woods by the Indiana County Crusaders, a Black Lick-based member of the Greater Eastern Football Association. Volunteers pictured are (back row, left to right): FWW President Sara King, Indiana County Crusaders Tony Parfitt, Jonathan Sprague; Isaac Witmer and Ben Ellis; Somerville resident Jordan Stanko. Front row (l to r): Crusaders Benjamin Rolley, Drew Rowland and Lucas Chambers; IUP graduate student in geography from Bakersville Joece Lynn and FWW Treasurer Tom Miller.*

WEED PULLING SCHEDULE

Volunteer weedpullers will meet the first and third Saturdays of the month: Nov. 4 and 18.

We are still in need of a new “crew chief” for the barberry removal on the Spring Trail. Please contact us at info@friendsofwhiteswoods.org.

Meet at 9:45 a.m. (**New Time**) at the **12th Street entrance**. Please wear heavy-duty gardening gloves and protect yourself from ticks.

Instructions on removing Japanese barberry will be given on-site.

Pulling is for one hour. We hope to see you there. And, bring a friend or two.

Next Naturally Column in the Indiana Gazette

The tenth *Naturally* column, sponsored by FWW and the *Indiana Gazette*, will appear soon in their weekend edition.

Titled *Presence of Seal Salamanders Indicates Healthy Ecosystem*, the article is written by Ed Patterson, director of Indiana County Parks and Trails. Missed the first nine columns?

You can read the nine previous columns at <https://www.friendsofwhiteswoods.org/general-7-1>.

UPCOMING WEBINARS AND EVENTS

Nov. 4 and 18*: 9:45 a.m. Japanese barberry removal, 12th Street entrance

Nov. 13: Stewardship Committee Meeting, 6:30 p.m., White Township Municipal Building. *Date changed to Monday for this meeting only.*

Nov. 16: Spirituality and the Climate Crisis webinar by Rev. Jim Antal, 4 to 5 p.m.

To register for FWW webinars, which are free and open to the public, please email at info@friendsofwhiteswoods.org. All previous webinars can be viewed at friendsofwhiteswoods.org/events.

***Note new time and starting location**

For more information, visit: friendsofwhiteswoods.org

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November 2023**

Plan Editing, Conservation/Preservation Debate, Old Growth Forest Network Dominate October Meeting

The predominant topic of the October meeting of the Stewardship Committee was the editing and organization of the final stewardship plan, which was presented in a preliminary draft stage, though many sections are yet to be written. Additional discussion included very brief commentary on the Old Growth Forest Network and on posting the plan for public input.

Forester Dave Babyak, who wrote the 2007-08 "Forest Stewardship and Management Plan," which was rejected by DCNR for excessive timber removal, asked that the committee consider who owns White's Woods and to develop a "multipurpose" plan that is not just designed for hikers. He asserted that the township and its citizens own WWNC, failing to acknowledge that Project 70 properties, while deeded to municipalities, were funded by Pennsylvania tax dollars, owned by Pennsylvania citizens, and, in the case of White's Woods, specified as an Indiana regional natural area park. Babyak quoted the definitions of conservation and preservation, contending that failing to harvest old or decaying trees was wasting resources and throwing away money.

Will Radell asserted that it is a mistake to

micromanage the forest on the assumption that something terrible will happen if it is left to natural processes. He further noted that decaying trees provide habitat for insects, woodpeckers, flying squirrels, and other species, and have great value to the forest well beyond the dollar value of the wood.

Chairperson Barbara Hague observed that community values are integral to the plan development, recognizing Friends of White's Woods for providing years of "immense and wide ranging" input, and promising that the plan will reflect community values.

A recurrent theme at the meeting was shortening each plan section to include only a brief description of the major points, followed by recommendations. Of particular note was the commentary on the Future Management section, with Sierra Davis stating that she didn't disagree with any of the four options, but thought they should be shortened and that the coordination with recommendations should be clearer.

The committee agreed that the Goals and Objectives had been approved, with Hague directing that they be posted on the committee's webpage, noting that they should be used to

drive future writing and editing.

Chauncey Ross presented information about the Old Growth Forest Network provided by township manager Chris Anderson, who was unable to attend the meeting. The township is considering the steps necessary for WWNC to be enrolled, and also investigating expanding the Natural Heritage Area, currently 43 acres.

While some sections remain unassigned, members volunteered for the November meeting: Hague – storm water; Davis – edit goals/objectives as discussed; Klunk – edit deer management; Davis/Dahlheimer – at-risk trees, canopy gaps; Dahlheimer – managing invasives, volunteers.

Prior to the next meeting, Dahlheimer will talk with Tyson Johnston, Land Stewardship Manager for the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, about speaking with the committee regarding management of an Old Growth Forest.

Forester Babyak continued his remarks from the earlier Public Comment session. He asserted that: hunting is allowed on any land purchased with Project 70 funds; that the focus on preservation in Project 70 is only for sites of historical significance, not the entire forest; and that manipulating the canopy is necessary to control invasive plants

Radell responded to Babyak's comments observing that while hunting is allowed on some Project 70 lands, it would only be approved in circumstances that were compatible with park use. Radell also explained that "preservation" does indeed include the protection of land for its natural scenic, historic and aesthetic values.

Babyak explained that he regarded White's Woods as a monoculture and that he believes that there are too many tulip poplars. Radell noted that tulip poplars are widespread from Florida throughout the north, and are both well adapted for climate change and fire resistant. Sara King pointed Babyak to the tree diversity inventory that identified 28 species of trees in White's Woods.

When Chairperson Hague asked if any committee members had any items "for the good of the order," Davis suggested that the final draft should be posted for public comment prior to submission, and that the committee should meet in February to incorporate their feedback. Recreation Director Ryan Shaffer stated that the supervisors need to review the document before public comment. Following discussion, Davis and Hague agreed that the public comment procedures would be an agenda item at the November meeting.

Stewardship Plan: Devil's in the Details

The White Township Stewardship Committee is nearing completion of a draft Stewardship Plan for White's Woods. At least two key questions remain.

First, will the draft plan be written in such a way that it affirms (1) the goals of Project 70; (2) the wishes of the public to leave White's Woods as a natural area as originally specified; (3) the importance of mature forests and big trees; (4) the inherent benefits of natural succession and "passive management;" (5) the importance of working in collaboration with the public for the Nature Center's future care; and (6) the importance of preserving this natural area/community forest for passive recreation, such as walking, hiking, and appreciation of nature?

At their October meeting, the White Township Stewardship Committee, which began meeting in January 2022, approved the goals and objectives for their draft plan. Without question, this document seems to "check every box" when it comes to the concerns listed above. This is a fantastically important step in the right direction.

But the second key question is what happens when the "rubber hits the road"? What happens when the Stewardship Committee Draft Plan is implemented, not just this year, but 10 years in the future? Will the canopy be protected? Will passive management and natural succession be the functional operational principles? Will the Township introduce new or old "reasons" for removing timber? Will we hear, again, the arguments that trees need to be removed because of forest pests, or too much dead wood, or wasted revenue, or, my goodness, invasive plants? Will we once again need to fend

off bogus arguments about a need for all forests to be actively "managed"? Or how (crop) trees in every forest need to be "thinned"?

The draft Stewardship Plan for White's Woods will, at some point, be posted for public review. Every part of the plan may look as promising as the approved plan Goals and Objectives. Or not.

We've learned from the work of other natural area stewards that protecting the canopy, relying on natural succession, and working collaboratively with the public are key components for preserving a natural area.

So far, thanks to enormous public effort, we've protected the canopy and left the forest to mature. And FWW has clearly demonstrated the value of public collaboration, providing the stewardship committee with data, including a tree inventory, an invasive and native plant inventory, and public input. We've also provided the committee with access to 29 public land or natural area plans or management recommendations. Our organization has established connections to forest ecologists and natural area specialists. We've started removing invasive plants, and, since July, have pulled over 100 bags of Japanese barberry --possibly over 3,000 plants -- from White's Woods.

The White Township Draft Stewardship Plan for White's Woods needs to make sure that its stated commitments are preserved in the plan's future implementation. The public needs to be involved at every step, not just racing to undue unwise decisions, as we have so often had to do in the past. Stay tuned. Weigh in when the plan is posted for review. Consider the details.

For more information, visit: friendsofwhiteswoods.org

**We welcome feedback. Email us at:
info@friendsofwhiteswoods.org**

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