

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

# Plan undervalues forest's non-timber products

I would like to comment as a biologist, resident of White's Woods and taxpayer in White Township on the supervisors' Forest Stewardship and Management Plan to timber White's Woods Nature Center.

After perusing the plan; reading editorials in The Indiana Gazette; consulting with naturalists, a certified wildlife biologist and a planner; and reading the book "Eastern Old-Growth Forests, Prospects for Rediscovery and Recovery," I have come to the conclusion that the plan is at best premature and at worst ill-advised.

The supervisors appear to view "health" of the nature center in the context of trees and timber productivity, while Friends of White's Woods views "health" in the context of ecological integrity. Ecological integrity, of course, not only includes trees, but also fungi, ferns, moss, flowering herbs and the animals that feed on these.

**FORESTS CAN YIELD** many services and products, including timber but also wildlife habitat, species biotic diversity, water quality and control and recreation. The supervisors apparently value timber extraction and sustainable forestry, while the Friends of White's Woods values second-growth (and eventually old-growth) forest conservation and forest-based recreation.

The plan undervalues the non-timber products of the nature center.

For example, the plan states, "There were no endangered or threatened species found in a PA Natural Diversity Inventory per-

formed." However, the inventory for Indiana County has not been completed and is not included in the statewide database used to search for these species. In any case, even if the nature center does not house protected species, it is home to three flowering herbaceous plants of interest and maybe other biota as well.

The plan states, "The large expanse of mature forest does not offer a diverse or special vegetative habitat for wildlife in general." Forest ecologists would disagree. In fact, old-growth forests, which White's Woods could become with a progressive management plan, are defined by their high diversity of plants and animals.

The plan recognizes that there are intermittent springs and seeps that should be protected with buffer zones, but does not address the larger issue of how timbering could alter the overall hydrology of the nature center, and potentially impact surrounding communities in the township and borough with surface and subsurface runoff. A retention pond for White's Run and roads in the vicinity of the nature center is already compromised by sedimentation and water damage.

The plan acknowledges overpopulation of deer in the nature center and recommends controlled hunting, but does not address how timbering could alter deer habitat. Promoting under-story plant growth by opening up the canopy could attract more deer to prime browsing habitat and aggravate the problems already associated with deer in

the surrounding residential areas.

The plan mentions passive recreational activities, and proposes to reduce impact on these activities by leaving buffer zones around some trails and timbering during low-use periods. However, it does not address how timbering 229 of 245 acres will affect overall recreational use of the nature center, especially from an aesthetic standpoint as it relates to the pacifying effects of forests.

**THE PLAN PROPOSES** removal of logging slash near trails, but does not address how the remaining logging slash along with increased sunlight and drying of the forest floor could create a fire hazard.

In addition to the plan's inadequate consideration of the non-timber products of the nature center, it is unclear whether this new plan is compatible with the county's comprehensive plan, Greenway's Open Space and Trail Plan; and Comprehensive Recreation and Parks Plan; and the township's comprehensive plan.

Considering that all of these plans are scheduled for completion in the next two years, and that they are paid for by taxpayers, it would seem prudent to wait and consider them before disturbing the nature center when it would take 70 years for it to return to its present state. To do otherwise would be a waste of the taxes used to develop these plans.

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