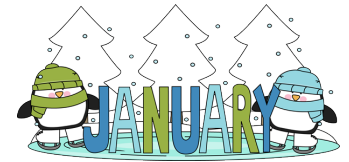




Friends of White's Woods Monthly Newsletter



Stewardship Committee Announces Draft Stewardship Plan Available for Public Review

The White Township Stewardship Committee agreed at the Dec. 21st meeting to post the White's Woods draft stewardship plan for public review for 90 days and that, at the conclusion of the review period, the committee will meet once or twice, with the permission of the White Township Board of Supervisors, to consider public input and revise the plan as appropriate.

The committee members agreed that the latest draft White's Woods stewardship plan, titled "Preservation and Conservation of White's Woods Nature Center: A Stewardship Plan for White's Woods," distributed to the committee at 4:30 p.m., just prior to the meeting, had been reviewed by the entire committee, even with the limited time frame.

Committee chair Barbara Hauge thanked the members of the committee (present were vice-chair David Dahlheimer and secretary Sierra Davis), as well as members of the public who attended committee meetings over the last two years, for both their energy and their hard work. Davis expressed her thanks to Hauge.

Hauge directed discussion to potential White's Woods stewardship plan implementation priorities that the committee might wish to recommend to the White Township Board of Supervisors and listed four categories of recommendations that might be important or slated for "early action:" (1) a small project for White Township staff; (2) a project that might require significant grant funding; (3) a program that can be instituted;

and (4) a policy that should be prioritized.

Dahlheimer pointed out that White Township staff already have a canopy-gap fencing project in motion that is consistent with existing draft plan recommendations. Davis agreed and underscored the importance of establishing the ecosystem monitoring projects that are articulated in the draft plan. The committee members cited deer fencing as the likely priority for grant funding, but noted that grant funding is likely to be available to support removal of invasive plants. Dahlheimer and Davis stated that quickly establishing the new Nature Center Stewards Committee, which is a new public "future management" committee outlined in the plan that will rely heavily on participation from FWW and other environmental groups, is a clear plan priority. Dahlheimer noted that the ongoing FWW invasive plant removal project is an important first step in the White's Woods stewardship plan's emphasis on the control of invasive plants.

Joining the Old Growth Forest Network, observed Hauge, is an important program identified in the draft plan that could be marked as a priority. On a related note, White Township Manager Chris Anderson informed the committee that the township has started the process of identifying all of White's Woods as a Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Area (NHA). Currently, only 43 acres in the Nature Center are formally identified as an NHA.

Hauge suggested that remodeling the 12th

Street entrance steps and/or improving "ADA" (Americans with Disabilities Act) access might be considered. Davis emphasized that no new management plans, beyond those identified in the completed committee-created and publicly-approved White's Woods stewardship plan, should suddenly appear and be regarded as priorities. It is important, Davis explained, that neither the public, nor the new Nature Center Stewards Committee, find themselves, once again, facing White's Woods plans that "come out of left field."

The committee members agreed to do more research regarding grant funding and re-visit the question of prioritization after the public review period.

The committee will send copies of the draft plan to various stakeholders, including Indiana Borough, Indiana County commissioners, director of Indiana County Parks and Trails, and others.

Although the meeting was largely celebratory, it ended on a down note. During the final Public Comment period, Alphonse Borowski, secretary of the White Township Recreation Board, suggested that the stewardship committee was unwise to root their plan in any information provided by FWW. FWW did make free webinars available to the committee and requested or commissioned independent White's Woods Nature Center inventories, surveys, and project assessments by faculty members from the Indiana University of Pennsylvania biology and sociology departments and from the University of Pittsburgh Invasive Plant Laboratory. One of those faculty members has since accepted a position at the Yale School of the Environment.

The White Township Stewardship Committee's draft plan, "[Preservation and Conservation of White's Woods Nature Center: A Stewardship Plan for White's Woods](#)," is now posted on the White Township web page and is available for public review until March 20.

UPCOMING WEBINARS AND EVENTS

Feb. 27: Draft Stewardship Plan Review webinar by White Township Manager Chris Anderson, noon to 1 p.m.

March/April: Barberry Pulling Bash. One Day Only. Put together your team of 10 people. More information in the February newsletter.

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/

For more information, visit: friendsofwhiteswoods.org

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Issue 43

January 2024

Nation Takes Steps to Preserve Old Growth Forests; Mitigate Climate Change

In December, President Joe Biden's administration proposed to end commercially driven logging of old-growth trees in National Forests.

In an article in Inside Climate News, "Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack, who oversees the U.S. Forest Service, issued a Notice of Intent to amend the land management plans of all 128 National Forests to prioritize old-growth conservation and recognize the oldest trees' unique role in carbon storage.

"It would be the first nationwide amendment to forest plans in the 118-year history of the Forest Service, where local rangers typically have the final word on how to balance forests' role in watershed, wildlife and recreation with the agency's mandate to maintain a 'sustained yield' of timber.

"Old-growth forests are a vital part of our ecosystems and a special cultural resource," Vilsack said in a statement accompanying the notice. "This clear direction will help our old-growth forests thrive across our shared landscape."



President Joe Biden records a video with University of Washington forest ecologist Susan Prichard at Seward Park in Seattle on April 22, 2022. **Official White House photo by Adam Schultz**

Go to <https://insideclimatenews.org/news/27122023/axed-biden-administration-historic-step-to-protect-old-growth-forest/> to read the full article.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture plan will conserve and steward old-growth forests on national forests and grasslands. That's because of the combined benefits for the climate, biodiver-

sity protection, reduced wildfire risk, and both cultural and recreational use by people.

Under the previous administration, federal officials sought to open up millions of acres of West Coast forests to potential logging. Federal wildlife officials reversed the move in 2021 after determining political appointees relied on faulty science to justify shrinking areas of forest considered crucial habitat for the imperiled northern spotted owl.

Increasing the area of old-growth forests in the United States would contribute to the climate resilience and landscape health of public lands. Mature forests are defined ecologically as the stage of forest development immediately before old growth. The mature stage generally begins when a forest stand moves beyond self-thinning, and is often marked by abundance of large trees, vertical canopy layers, aboveground biomass accumulation and stand height, as well as other attributes.

Citizens' Responsibility: Comment on Draft White's Woods Stewardship Plan

Since its inception nearly 30 years ago, FWW has been dedicated to protecting the glorious White's Woods canopy and to allowing our second-growth forest to mature into old growth via natural succession. The FWW mission emphasizes the importance of alerting the community to the extraordinary value of White's Woods as a regional natural area for passive recreation, but also for the role it plays in various "ecosystem" services, including carbon absorption and temperature mediation. FWW has long emphasized the importance of seeking input from expert consultants who look at a forest as a complex set of interlocking ecosystems with an eye toward preservation. More recently, FWW has seen -- and responded to -- the need to control invasive plants with minimally-intrusive removal methods. All along, FWW has emphasized the importance of public input in forest management decisions.

The White Township Stewardship Committee's draft stewardship plan for White's Woods, in significant ways and at long last, documents, a shared understanding between White Township and the public regarding both the importance of our Nature Center natural area and the management approach necessary for its preservation.

The Executive Summary of the White's Woods Nature Center Draft Plan underscores the committee's key findings from their work with consultants and with public input: "(1)

protect the forest canopy; (2) focus on conservation, preservation, and protection; (3) control invasive plants; (4) rely on extensive collaboration with local environmental groups; (5) rely on extensive public engagement during implementation and any plan updates; and (6) establish routine monitoring of the forest."

This summary emphasizes that "White's Woods Nature Center is recognized as a special place in our community and the desire of this committee and the public is to see this woodland develop into an old-growth forest."

An important recommendation made by the committee is that no downed wood should leave the forest. Downed wood is critically important for habitat and soil enrichment. The recommendation to leave all downed wood in the forest makes it clear that the White Township Stewardship Committee understands that our forest is a natural area and needs to be managed as such. No trees, said the committee, should be cut except under extraordinary circumstances and with the support of both consultants and the public.

The committee made clear recommendations for protecting at-risk species, relying on least-intrusive management techniques, and respecting the importance of large, old trees in mitigating climate change.

The White Township Stewardship Committee's draft plan, "Preservation and Conservation of White's Woods Nature Center: A

Stewardship Plan for White's Woods," is now posted on the White Township web page and is available for public review until March 20.

It is very important that FWW members weigh in to support the strong parts of this new plan and to provide feedback for corrections as needed.

As solid as the overall approach to White's Woods preservation is in this draft management plan, how the plan is implemented is of equal importance. How effective will the public's role in future management be? Will future consultants understand the ecological significance of this forest? Are individual parts of the plan, such as those outlining Nature Center policies, deer management, future management, and management philosophy laid out clearly enough to reflect ideal management goals and public wishes?

We owe congratulations to the White Township Stewardship Committee and thanks for all of their hard work. Now it is time for the public to do its job. Remember, it is very important to support the strong features of the plan. And equally important to provide feedback to help with its improvement.

Comments can be submitted to the Township via email at winfo@whitetownship.org or other ways that can be reviewed here: <https://www.whitetownship.org/white-township-stewardship-committee>

For more information, visit: friendsofwhiteswoods.org
We welcome feedback. Email us at:
info@friendsofwhiteswoods.org

Issue 43
January 2024