



Friends of White's Woods, Inc.

P.O. Box 1271
Indiana, PA 15701

April 25, 2024

White Township Stewardship Committee
950 Indian Springs Road
Indiana, PA 15701

Dear Barb, Sierra, Dave, Matt, and Jeff:

Friends of White's Woods (FWW) is aware that one of the responsibilities of a Friends group is to facilitate public engagement, thereby promoting stronger citizen connection to the larger community and to municipal government. In the interest of meeting this responsibility, FWW prepared a checklist to help facilitate public input in response to the White's Woods 2023 Draft Stewardship Plan that was posted for public review on December 23, 2023.

The checklist drew upon key points of the White's Woods 2023 Draft Stewardship Plan as articulated in the plan's Executive Summary, Goals and Objectives, and Management Philosophy, as was no doubt apparent to the Stewardship Committee members at a quick glance. (See attached.)

A large percentage of the checklists were shared with White's Woods hikers and bikers as they entered at the Nature Center's 12th Street Entrance. All of those who stopped to talk (and almost all did) expressed a very strong interest in protecting the woods. Some immediately commented that they were "all about protecting White's Woods" and "leaving the forest in its natural state;" others said that they have recently moved to be closer to the woods. A number of people mentioned that they were really pleased that the Township finally understands the importance of White's Woods to our community.

The checklist was primarily used to begin conversation. In every conversation, all individuals were shown how they could read the plan and submit emails directly to the Township. QR codes linking to the plan and to the Township website input option were printed on the checklist. The conversations about the Stewardship Draft Plan generally lasted from 20 minutes to an hour. Even so, most citizens who looked at the checklist took it with them to consider as they looked at the plan when they got home.

It is important that the White Township Stewardship Committee recognize the depth of concern and commitment behind each checklist that was submitted as public input regarding the White's Woods 2023 Draft Stewardship Plan. Many of those who used the FWW checklist as their primary vehicle for public input added comments to the form. Others relied entirely on the written summary to register their responses, as indicated by an "x" or "√". In either case, it is critical that the Committee and White Township staff understand that the public input/comment via these checklists deserves both respect and recognition of the level of commitment invested by citizens in this public feedback process.

In many cases, FWW provided a necessary avenue for public knowledge of the Draft Stewardship plan. We are pleased that our public outreach efforts had a notable impact on public input and public involvement and, in that way, helped to facilitate both Township and DCNR goals.

On a related matter, we would like to thank White Township for sharing all public feedback to the White's Woods Draft Stewardship Plan in response to Open Records requests. We have spent much time reviewing and summarizing this data and trust that our work can be of use to the committee:

- I. FWW summary/understanding of data/feedback to plan
 - I. Of 210 responses (208 individuals and two organizations):
 - a. 71 used the Township's online form;
 - b. 56 sent emails/letters to the Township;
 - c. 93 used the FWW submission form; 15 included comments and five submitted separate comments via email
 - d. 10 individuals responded using two of the above methods
 - II. 200 (95%) respondents stated that they support the draft plan (n=196) or the goals of the plan, (n=4), and in many cases indicated reasons for their support. The remaining eight responses critiqued grammar and/or specific management issues (e.g. deer browsing, ticks, erosion, dog walking, invasive plants), but did not evaluate the plan. None of the respondents rejected the plan.
 - III. In addition to overwhelming support for the plan, respondents frequently cited specific reasons especially important to them, as follows:
 - 69% allowing the forest to mature to old growth and enrolling White's Woods in the Old Growth Forest Network.
 - 59% use the least-intrusive management as the "default" choice, and supports natural forest maturation processes.
 - 58% public involvement in making every management decision.
 - 58% NO wood should be removed from the forest, recognizing that dead wood is critically important to the health of the forest ecosystem.
 - 53% need to protect the canopy.
 - 53% future management must rely on appropriate experts such as forest ecologists.
 - 50% strictly limit the cutting of any trees.
 - 50% the role that White's Woods plays in various "ecosystem" services, including carbon absorption and temperature mediation.
 - 49% protection and monitoring of at-risk plant, bird, and animal species
 - 49% the value of White's Woods as a natural area for passive recreation.
 - 48% creation of a "Stewards Committee."
 - 40% the role of Project 70.

- IV. Additional specific suggestions were as follows:
- a. Continue hand pulling of invasive plants (15)
 - b. Strategically install deer exclusion fencing (7)
 - c. Increase educational activities, including the use of educational signage (5)
 - d. Improve directional signage
 - e. Improve protection for fragile trails
 - f. Avoid heavy equipment use
 - g. Ban all hunting (9)
 - h. Engage with the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy
 - i. Permit limited (1) or unlimited (2) hunting
 - j. Purchase more land to expand the nature center
- V. Many respondents noted the advantages of WWNC in their narrative:
- a. Health benefits of exercise (6)
 - b. Close proximity to town (7)
 - c. Increase the desirability of the area to self and/or prospective residents (11)
 - d. Share nature with family/friends
 - e. Use WWNC for hiking (13), cross-country skiing (4), dog walking (6), photography
- VI. Many respondents recounted the importance of WWNC to them personally:
- a. Relocated to live near the woods (5)
 - b. Grew up playing in WW
 - c. Taught their children about nature in WW
 - d. Got engaged in WW

It is important to note that we have reviewed all 210 responses numerous times. And we do believe that this summary provides a very good comprehensive picture of public response to the Stewardship Committee's work. The overall plan and each of its major components and recommendations enjoy overwhelming public support and we congratulate you on your work.

Sincerely,

Board of Directors,
Friends of White's Woods

