



Money doesn't grow on trees: Nature center may lose 250 acres of trees for monetary gain

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White's Woods offers maps to give direction on where to go while traveling (left) but trees that are marked with red spray paint or ribbons are in danger of being destroyed for monetary gain (right).

Kate Pompa/The Penn

White's Woods Nature Center (WWNC) is likely an area that many professors and students at IUP are at least vaguely familiar with, if not emotionally connected to, and this beautiful natural area is under threat. To clarify the dire situation for those who are unfamiliar with the area, WWNC is made up of 250 acres of beautiful naturally forested land in Indiana that is publicly owned by White Township.

The White Township has regarded this protected forested area as an opportunity for exploitation and a means to make a bundle of money through the deforestation of this area for years.

Luckily, there is an organization whose sole aim is to save and continually protect this gorgeous nature center, and they call themselves Friends of White's Woods (FWW).

This non-profit citizen's organization formed 25 years ago in 1995 in response to White Township's plans to deforest the area and turn the 250 acres of naturally growing trees into timber to make a profit.

Part of the mission of FWW is to preserve the nature center and allow the forest to achieve natural succession into a mature hardwood forest without disruption. This is important for many aspects of the environment which includes: the maintenance of the water quality of the surrounding areas through the prevention of erosion caused by deforestation and plant removal, to conserve the natural species of plants and animals alike that thrive in the nature center that prefer mature hardwood forests as their habitat range, and to maintain the carbon-filtering ability of the trees and plants there among many other environmental conditions of great importance.

FWW also aims to educate the public about how valuable all nature centers are to the environment as a whole and want to further educate the community about White's Woods specifically. This requires the identification of the role that White's Woods plays in the natural environment and the positive effect the area has on the community's quality of life.

At a recent meeting of the White Township supervisors, the organization's board of directors were asked what FWW has done to help White's Woods?

They responded with the fact they believe their organization's most important accomplishment is that 250 acres of trees are now 25 years older than they ever could have been if the 1995 deforestation plan had been implemented by White Township supervisors.

"This is Indiana's park, purchased with project 70 funds in the 1960's specifically for the purpose of conservation, recreation and historical preservation," Sara King, president of the FWW said. "No other area forests were acquired in this way nor bordering directly on the borough.

"The White Township supervisors regard the park as a 'cash cow,' i.e. a timber farm, which directly violates the purposes of the land. This is their third attempt to timber (1995, 2007-08, and 2020)."

So far, FWW has succeeded in blocking their attempts.

They have taken many steps to ensure the protection of this land. Some of these accomplishments include spreading mulch on the forest's trails, cutting wild invasive grape vines, planting native trees and wild flowers, with the approval of White Township, routinely cleaning up litter to maintain the nature park's condition, repairing the bridge that needed attention, and reporting negative activities to the proper authorities, which includes the use of motorized vehicles within the nature center, campfires, partying and illegal dumping.

They have also been involved in a project to compile a set of steps in the nature center, taken surveys from used of WWNC and promoted the respectful use of the nature center by the community. They have keep the public informed by distributing yard signs and newsletters with up-to-date information, organized group woods walks and even began a "Story Walk" project.

The FWW organization has even gone so far as to hire legal counsel three separate times to research the Project 70 regulations, second class township codes and open government practices. There is no doubt that this organization has been responsible for White's Woods successful survival many times over.

The White's Woods' website offers extensive information including a disturbingly recent development about the Township's current plans for deforestation. The FWW website page explains how in April, trees in the nature center have been seen with green spray paint markings on them, which was presumed to be for deforestation purposes.

Over the course of the months following April, it was discovered that the Township's supervisors had been planning to go through with a secret timber project since December of 2018.

Despite many challenges and the persistence of White Township in attempts to destroy this natural area, FWW is fully dedicated to the cause of bettering the natural environment and protecting the WWNC seemingly at all costs. Their success is encouraging, and they invite new members and urge further efforts to continue helping the cause of protecting the WWNC.

To join in the efforts of this organization, there are links to their membership form and their GoFundMe account on the FWW website. To contribute monetarily to their cause, checks can be sent to FWW, PO Box 1271, Indiana, PA 15701.

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