



Friends of White's Woods Monthly Newsletter



Dr. Marion Holmes

MAY WEBINAR: Tree Diversity In White's Woods

The May 25th webinar will include data on the diversity of trees in White's Woods, their locations, the variety of canopy composition, challenges to forest health and recommendations for maintaining what has been described as a healthy second-generation forest with high potential for Old Growth Forest status.

Prepared by Dr. Marion Holmes -- and funded by FWW -- the report indicates more than 28 tree species in the woods.

Holmes is an adjunct instructor at Unity College. She earned a Ph.D. in environmental and plant biology from Ohio University and a bachelor of science in horticulture from Temple University. Holmes taught at Chatham University and mentored students as part of her postdoctoral fellowship at the University of Pittsburgh. Her teaching interests include increasing students' appreciation of the relationships among plants, people, and history.

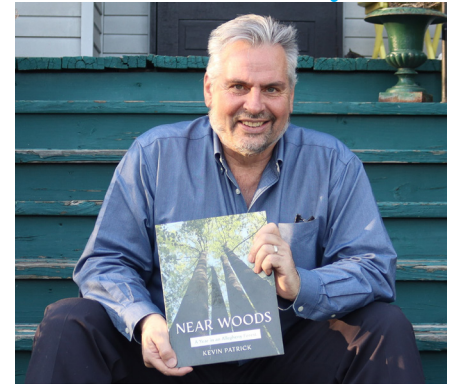
Book on White's Woods Now Available

Near Woods; A Year in an Allegheny Forest, a well-illustrated nature book by IUP geography and regional planning professor Dr. Kevin Patrick, describes the seasonal changes that take place in a 500-acre patch of Allegheny forest adjacent to Indiana known as White's Woods and the adjacent IUP Co-op Park.

After countless hikes through White's Woods, I was compelled to write this book not only because of the inspiring forest of tulip trees, oaks, hickories, wildflowers, and wildlife found there, but because of the apparent human footprint I kept stumbling over in my search for nature. Trails crisscross White's Woods, but so do gas lines buried in the earth like the underlying coal that was mined into decades ago when huge swaths of White's Woods were clear-cut for timber, farmed, or quarried for sandstone.

The woods are littered with evidence of these former lives, muted by subsequent growth of vegetation that provides the hiker with the illusion of continuity that these woods are a fragment of some forest primeval.

This was the compelling place I wanted to write about; a near-woods environment that existed everywhere nature and community rubbed shoulders and grew up in tandem. My path was lit by others who had gone before. Henry David Thoreau did not go to a far woods wilderness to live like a hermit for the two years (1845-47) that he wrote about in Walden. He went to the near-woods of Concord, Mass., where he planted beans, watched ice-cutters on the pond, and befriended a lumberjack. Walt Whitman did the same when, in his last years, he frequented the woods adjacent to Laurel Springs, N.J. *Near Woods* tells the nat-



Dr. Kevin Patrick and the *Near Woods*

ural and human story of White's Woods, which is representative of near-woods everywhere.

Near Woods; A Year in an Allegheny Forest is available at The Book Nook, 711 Philadelphia St.; The Artists Hand, 732 Philadelphia St.; and The Coop Store on the IUP campus; or at your favorite online book dealer.

Join me at the 12th Street entrance to White's Woods for an Indiana County WalkWorks hike and book signing at 10 am, May 13; at the Artists Hand for a book signing May 27, 11 am-1 pm.; and at the Indiana County Historical Society for the presentation, "History's Mysteries in White's Woods" on June 8, 6:30 pm.

Notes:

The May webinar will be the last before the summer break. They will resume in September. FWW will be at May Mart at the S&T Arena May 19 (9 a.m. to 7 p.m.) and May 20 (9 a.m. to 4 p.m.)

FWW participated in Hawk Walk, Friday, April 28, at IRMC Park.

Next Naturally Column in the Indiana Gazette

The fourth *Naturally* column, sponsored by FWW and the *Indiana Gazette*, appeared in the April 29/30 weekend edition.

Titled *Raptors live, soar and thrive for survival in wild*, the article is written by Anthony Frazier, a raptor enthusiast, local broadcaster, photographer and community volunteer. Read about the raptors in our area in this informative article. Missed the first three columns?

The first column appeared Jan. 28th; the second, March 4/5; the third, March 35/26. You can read the three columns at <https://www.friendsofwhiteswoods.org/general-7-1>.

UPCOMING WEBINARS AND EVENTS

May 18: White Township Stewardship Committee meeting. 6:30 p.m., White Township Municipal Building.

May 19-20: May Mart, S&T Bank Arena. Friday: 9 a.m. to 7 p.m.; Saturday: 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

May 25: "Tree Diversity Study of White's Woods Nature Center." Dr. Marion Holmes, University of Pittsburgh's Kuebbing Lab.

The webinars, offered via Zoom from 4 to 5 p.m., are free and open to the public. To register for a webinar, send an email to info@friendsofwhiteswoods.org. Recordings of all webinars are available at [friendsofwhiteswoods.org/events](https://www.friendsofwhiteswoods.org/events)

For more information, visit: [friendsofwhiteswoods.org](https://www.friendsofwhiteswoods.org)

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APRIL STEWARDSHIP COMMITTEE MEETING EXAMINED PUBLIC INPUT; OUTLINED KNOWLEDGE GAINED, KNOWLEDGE NEEDED

IUP professor Dr. Susan Boser discussed with the White Township Stewardship Committee April 20 community engagement, emphasizing that, as part of the public governing process, all of the information gathered so far -- a summary of findings, recommendations, challenges, and concerns -- must be put out in the public sphere.

Committee member Sierra Davis noted the committee has extensive public input in hand, including FWW surveys and the 2022 IUP Community Interest Study, and that the community's perspective is clear: White's Woods should be left as a natural area, and not be timbered. What is important, Davis emphasized, is that the committee needs to make sure that future proposals, such as those related to passive management or deer fencing, do not come as a surprise to the public.

Committee members Geesey and Klunk wondered if the extensive public input data that has been reviewed really reflects views of all the public, or whether there are voices that have not been heard. Boser pointed out the 2022 Community Interest Study was, in part, premised on this question and that the study was intentionally designed to reach out to groups that might have a different perspective. Boser also noted that questions about proper care for White's Woods have been in the public eye for decades and opportunities to provide input have been plentiful. Those who care deeply about the question have had the chance to provide input.

Township Recreation Director Ryan Shaffer expressed his concern that recreational hunters and mountain bikers need more chance for input.

Boser also discussed ways to inform the public about the committee's work and gather public feedback to their new proposals via email distribution lists and meetings with various stakeholders, such as the Tourist Bureau and Chamber of Commerce.

Committee members Davis and David Dahlheimer presented a summary list of what the committee still needs to learn. This need-to-know list included information related to at-risk species, forest ecosystem monitoring, protection of fragile trails, volunteer programs, evaluation of herbicide use, use policies, and stewardship plan implementation guidelines. Also included in this list was a need to learn about the benefits of forest connectivity, membership in the Old Growth Forest Network, transferring White's Woods to a land conservancy, and the potential for grant funding.

Davis and Dalheimer also presented a summary of what the committee has learned from

consultants, so far: the need to protect the tree canopy; the fact that the White's Woods overstory is healthy and diverse; the need to address invasive plants and deer browse to protect the understory; the fact that natural forest development processes work; the benefits of joining the Old Growth Forest Network; the need for extensive ecosystem data (e.g. at-risk species; wildlife; trail conditions); the importance of deer fencing to protect the understory; the fact that public input should drive all management decisions; and recognition of the impact of climate change.

Hauge noted this list is an important step in summarizing the committee's work to date. However, she cut off the presentation half-way through. Hauge suggested that this discussion might resume at the committee's May meeting.

Regarding the stewardship plan completion, Hauge presented her draft outline. The document was not circulated prior to the meeting, but she emphasized that her draft is a beginning point and that the committee will be adding additional sections.

Dahlheimer suggested that the final plan should include statements, all omitted from Hauge's draft outline, regarding management philosophy, the role of public input, implementation guidelines, lessons from sample public land stewardship plans, and a clear description of the defined uses of White's Woods for passive recreation.

Davis also suggested additions to Hauge's draft outline, including descriptions of White's Woods waterways, steps for mitigating climate change, mechanisms for forest monitoring, the inclusion of existing survey data, and the general value of White's Woods to the community.

Davis suggested that the committee follow Boser's advice and have their recommendations ready before engaging with the public and asking for further feedback, though Hauge thought that waiting to meet with the public until recommendations are completed is not necessary.

There was a brief discussion of the committee's mission statement. Some members argued that the mission statement should be short. Dalheimer suggested that the committee needs to identify what the public needs to hear and where that information will appear in the plan, even if it is not included in the mission. Davis emphasized that the goal of writing a mission statement to gain public trust should remain a primary focus. Davis also suggested that the committee meet with Friends of White's Woods to discuss this question.

All documents presented at meetings are posted on the Stewardship Committee website.

WANTED!

Your Feedback, Input

In the next few months, the White Township Stewardship Committee intends to ask the public for feedback to their new draft stewardship plan. All who want to protect White's Woods as a natural area for passive recreation must speak up. FWW and other community members have fought for nearly 30 years to protect this Project 70 land. When the new plan is laid out, all must weigh in again.

We need to take care of our natural area by doing what other public land natural areas do: protect the existing tree canopy because doing so is critical to control invasive plants and to provide shade for hiking in our ever-hotter summers.

We need to make sure that this one forested area, specifically set aside for passive recreation, such as hiking, walking, birdwatching, and photography, continues to be protected for these purposes. The Township has plenty of opportunities for active recreation and organized sports, but only one area -- White's Woods -- is designated solely for passive recreation.

We need to make sure that all "management" plans for White's Woods take an ecological perspective and stay aware of ALL the interlocking ecosystems that, together, make up a forest. A management philosophy that promises the "least-intrusive" management activity can support natural forest development processes and allow our big trees to get bigger and our forest to grow old.

Trees do come down in storms, as recently happened. And there are ways to work with this new natural canopy "gap" that promote forest health and, at the same time, protect the forest ecosystems. Leave the dead wood! The forest needs dead wood (but move it away from the trails). Keep heavy machinery out of the woods! Heavy machinery damages plants, roots, the mycelium network, and spreads invasive plant seeds. Control the invasive plants. Take advantage of the gap to plant young trees. Support natural forest development processes.

FWW will be reaching out to let you know when new feedback is being requested. At the same time, it is very important that you are on the lookout for requests for feedback to the new stewardship plan.

And, if you can spare a few hours on the third Thursday of the next two to three months, please attend the White Township Stewardship meeting (6:30 p.m., White Township Municipal Building), so that public input can be registered as this plan is developed.



Earth Day 2023: A little rain didn't stop the fun at White's Woods.

For more information, visit: friendsofwhiteswoods.org

We welcome feedback. Email us at:

info@friendsofwhiteswoods.org

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