

LETTER: White's Woods invited to join Old Growth Forest Network

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Dale Luthringer, DCNR environmental education specialist at Cook Forest State Park, conducted a Friends of White's Woods webinar Nov. 22 about big trees in Pennsylvania, including in White's Woods.

Luthringer describes Pennsylvania's oldest trees as "witness trees." These trees have stood by over centuries of history. Not long ago, Cook Forest lost their oldest, 429-year-old cucumber tree. This tree had been standing for nearly 200 years before the United States was established as an independent country. A massive sugar maple near North Springfield, it stood for 250 years, getting its start around the time of the French-Indian War.

Old cemeteries, Luthringer explained, are great places to look for big, old trees. A 150–200-year-old, 13.3-foot CBH (circumference at breast height), 72 H (height) cucumber tree was found in a cemetery near Erie, for instance.

All old trees aren't necessarily that big. The Pennsylvania state and U.S. national "co-champ" Hawthorne tree is 6.1 CBH and 27.3 H. The state champ sassafras is 16.3 CBH and 59 feet H.

Cook Forest leads our state in the "Rucker's Index," an index documenting the tallest trees of 10 different species. The tallest trees in Cook Forest include an eastern white pine (11.1 CBH; 183.6 H), an eastern hemlock (12 CBH; 145.4 H); a tulip poplar (7.4 CBH; 141.4 H), and a black cherry (11.4 CBH; 137.3 H).

Luthringer has spent time measuring trees in White's Woods and reports finding tulip trees that top 140 feet in two sections of our woods, with one (9.6 CBH and 145.8 H) larger than the tallest tulip tree at Cook Forest. He also found a red oak bigger than any now at Cook Forest (13.4 CBH; 120+ H) and some 200-year-old trees, as well.

Pennsylvania forests are now recovering from the 1870-1920 statewide clear-cut. Patches of old growth did survive. But, just as importantly, the Old Growth Forest Network is celebrating and protecting mature, second-growth forests so that they may become old growth. Thirty-two PA forests are in the Old

Growth Forest Network and thanks much to the work of Luthringer, White's Woods has been invited to join.

Sara King

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