



[The old White Township supervisors shuffle. Again.](#)

Posted on [April 8, 2022](#) by [David Loomis](#)



Friends of White's Woods yard sign, Indiana, Pa. Photo by David Loomis

White's Woods chronicles

By Sara King

WHITE TOWNSHIP — Township supervisors last year [established](#) a [Stewardship Committee](#) to develop a plan for [White's Woods](#) and other wooded areas owned by the township.

The panel's most recent meeting revealed that it's *déjà vu* all over again.

In 1995, when the township had its first bright idea to timber White's Woods, the plan was to develop the park. Put in an amphitheater. Or a garden. Then-township manager Larry Garner,

according to an April 13, 1995, [article in The Indiana Gazette](#), said he knew that the plans were unpopular.

How unpopular were they? The township mailed a ballot to every township resident. More than 2,400 ballots were mailed back to the township office. Nearly two-thirds of the respondents said to leave White's Woods alone. Leave it as a natural area.

Imagine [Friends of White's Woods](#)' surprise when, at the March 31 meeting of the Stewardship Committee, suggestions all-too-similar to those put forward in 1995 came up again.

Chairwoman [Barbara Hauge](#) implored the panel to “think about [the woods] in new ways” and “be wide open” to suggestions for future designs. Ms. Hauge urged that “sale of timber” be considered as one of the possible uses of the woods, although she didn't think that anyone in the room really wanted that. Using felled trees to teach young people how to build wood structures was another idea the chair suggested that the committee consider. A fellow committee member chimed in to suggest that, perhaps, the timber they took out from the woods could be donated to Habitat for Humanity.

“Sometimes we have to sacrifice a bit of habitat to get people to appreciate it.” said Ms. Hauge. “It is a “no brainer. We want people to love the area, even if we have to sacrifice habitat.”

Oh, my. Back to the future to find some “new” old reasons to pay a forester to timber in our Project 70 natural area.

THERE IS A BETTER way — the potential for a township carbon-credit contract for White's Woods.



Sunset, White's Woods trail, June 18, 2020. Photo: Cheri Hinchman Widzowski/Facebook.

In September 2021, Alyson Fearon, senior director of community conservation and resiliency for the [Allegheny Land Trust](#), offered to investigate a [carbon sequestration](#) contract for the White's Woods Nature Center. Ms. Fearon noted in her Friends of White's Woods public [webinar presentation](#) that she believed a conservative estimate for potential payment to the township was \$211,000 — to be paid within the first three to five years of the contract, minus fees.

The plan would skip significant timbering in the forest for 40 years. Let the forest mature and protect our community by absorbing more excess carbon. Do nothing. Leave it as the Project 70 natural area that it is supposed to be.

At an October meeting of the township Board of Supervisors, Friends of White's Woods urged the supervisors to consider this offer. The supervisors' reply: You need to talk to the new White Township Stewardship Committee which will begin meeting in January 2022. The committee will handle all questions regarding the management of White's Woods.

So, at the [February meeting](#) of the new Township Stewardship Committee, FWW urged committee members to consider the land trust's offer.

“Carbon sequestration is a very new field,” Ms. Hauge told the committee members. “By the time this plan is written, whatever is out there is going to be different.”

It is of note that an offer to facilitate a municipal carbon-sequestration contract is incredibly rare and probably time-limited. Only two or three organizations are interested in facilitating municipal carbon sequestration contracts in Pennsylvania. And Allegheny Land Trust staff isn't paid to be “on-call” for White Township.



Barbara Hauge, chair, White Township Stewardship Committee. Photo: UpStreet Architects website.

Chairwoman Hauge did note that “unless the supervisors have acted on it,” the Committee might consider vetting this idea with the public in the future.

At the [Feb. 23 township supervisors meeting](#), Friends of White’s Woods again urged supervisors to seriously pursue the land trust’s offer. This time the answer to the sequestration contract question was a little different: It was accompanied by a barrage of insults aimed by supervisors at the FWW board member who raised concern in the public comment period about the township’s limited effort to follow up on the land trust’s offer.

BUT THE CORE of the supervisors’ answer was the same: The White Township Stewardship Committee will answer this question.

Still hopeful, David Dahlheimer, who is a member of both the Township Stewardship Committee and Friends of White’s Woods, emailed a request to the committee chair that carbon sequestration for White’s Woods be added to the committee’s March 31 agenda.

No, replied Ms. Hauge. The panel’s role “was to create a stewardship plan for White’s Woods,” she said. “That is work that is outside of this committee.”

The question did not appear on the March committee agenda.

Oh, my. White Township officials and representatives are making decisions about carbon sequestration in White’s Woods by refusing to seriously investigate it. But who is accountable?

THERE ARE 39,000 municipal entities in the United States. Fewer than 100 of these have been able to secure carbon sequestration funding, nailing down contracts that poured hundreds of thousands of dollars (or more) into municipal coffers. White Township had a serious offer to investigate. But they decided to spurn this one.

Luckily for county taxpayers, [Indiana County Parks and Trails](#) did follow up on the land trust’s offer regarding a contract for one of their public lands. The outcome of this investigation is unknowable at this point. It takes time for the land trust to develop a proposal. Only then can the proposal be evaluated.

But at least the county was willing to try to see if significant revenue could be secured by promising to leave their woods in their natural state, and, by doing so, shore up municipal bank accounts. Good work by county staff and officials.

Unluckily for devoted protectors of our natural area, the FWW 16-month effort to find a path forward for the care of White’s Woods that would provide benefits for all parties, fell flat, thanks to the inscrutable deliberations of the township.

The township interests in White's Woods, whatever they are, do not include receiving \$200,000 to let the forest continue to mature just as it should — unless the township reconsiders and unless Allegheny Land Trust chooses to find a way, once again, to fit White Township into the land trust's busy work schedule.

WHITE'S WOODS is a natural area. It was purchased with state tax-payer funds to remain as a natural area for such "passive recreation" as walking, running, hiking, and birdwatching. We have other regional groomed parks.

We can let our young community forest mature. Natural succession works. The world needs big trees. In fact, we need to protect our trees now more than ever, given the severity of the climate threat that we face.

State Bureau of Forestry Director [Matt Keefer](#) has noted that our public forests provide such things as clean water, recreation and tourism, plant and animal habitat, peace and solitude, scenic and aesthetic beauty, carbon sequestration and human health benefits.



Sara King, president, Friends of White's Woods. Submitted photo.

Friends of White's Woods recently offered [44 suggestions](#) for care for White's Woods, backed by data, including [inventories of the woods](#). All of those suggestions point to preserving big trees, not timbering them.

Project 70 provided funds to purchase this natural area. It is up to us to protect it. Again.

Editor's note: A proposal regarding timbering in White's Woods is scheduled for the White Township Stewardship Committee meeting on April 21, 6:30 p.m., at the township building, 950 Indian Springs Road.

Sara King, of White Township, is president of Friends of White's Woods. She is an emeritus professor of psychology at Saint Francis University

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2 Responses to *The old White Township supervisors shuffle. Again.*

1.  [Jim Cahalan, Austin, Texas](#) says:

[April 8, 2022 at 11:22 am](#)

I was there, very active, through that whole 1995 saga, ending in that 2-to-1 vote against logging, after which board chair Rocco Yanity called it off. There's a very simple explanation for the current board's behavior as covered in your excellent article: Like their hero Donald J. Trump, they oppose democracy and aim to overcome the clear will of their constituents. If that same vote were taken today, it would go against even much more strongly (likewise 90% against what they want to do to destroy White's Woods). That's why of course the supervisors don't want to conduct another such survey, and why they very willfully forget the 1995 one. BTW Texas has a bad rep for lots of reasons, but I'm typing this from my house in Austin, looking outside at beautiful woods surrounding me that are forever protected from "development" by state, city, and local laws.

[Reply](#)

2.  [Charles Manges](#) says:

[April 10, 2022 at 6:46 pm](#)

Thoughts spring to mind; namely, what is required for White Township to oust the obstinate, designated "leaders" who, as predictably as the forsythia blooming outside my

window, circle around White's Wood with visions of chainsaws dancing in their heads, despite the overwhelming and increasingly frustrated opposition from their constituents? Surely, they must begin to wonder if, somewhere in the cul de sacs of Indiana's outlying neighborhoods, a cauldron of tar has been set to bubbling, a bushel or two of freshly plucked feathers waiting close beside it?

And what is it about White's Woods that draws tomfoolery and absurdity piled each above the other at a scale far beyond its meager acreage? From the rationale of hacking down all the big (seed bearing!) trees to make room for little trees to magically appear in some perverse botanical immaculate conception, to the belly-shaking concept of "churning" the soil of the denuded landscape, post-harvest, in order to stimulate growth of those same magic trees—without, somehow, stirring a generation of invasives to throttle the tender little seedlings. Now, we're going to saw down trees and give away the timber? To teach youngsters how to build shelters? To house the poor?

Huh?

Are we talking lean-tos or longhouses? Can we weave the miles of wild grape fiber into canvas for sturdy tents that ward off our infamous rainfall? Of course, given the recent and continued results of our trickle-down economy, it might not, at first glance, seem impractical to teach the next generation how to craft shelters from "resources." But I jest. With the right technique, it's possible to hack some fairly sturdy shingles—Thoreau wrote a fun manual on the whole process. And with all the mud left over from those logging trucks ruts and skidder trails, there will be easy access to good old Westsylvanian clay to chink log cabins. Move over park: we're building a shantytown!

This shouldn't be that difficult. We're not the first community who've set their minds towards protecting and preserving a dinky little park. Or even the hundredth. And the added advantage of actually funding conservation via carbon sequestration is a tool that most of those communities surely wish they'd been able to access. The science is out there. The experience is out there, and it doesn't involve amphitheaters (and the inevitable infrastructure to go with them) or rototillers or sawing the whole damned place to the ground to house the poor.

We can do better. For the gods' sakes, this is the birthplace of Edward Abbey, one of the clearest and cleanest literary voices and defenders of the wild that the world has ever known. Of course, it's no revelation that Abbey's name is rarely invoked, nor why, but maybe it is time for us to embrace that legacy. There's room for two statues in town. And there is room for trees in the future of White Township.

[Reply](#)