



Friends of White's Woods Monthly Newsletter



Respondents Support Draft Stewardship Plan

Before the public input period ended on March 22nd, 225 citizens provided feedback to the White's Woods Draft Stewardship Plan.

More than 98 percent supported the draft plan. Many pointed to the value of particular components. For instance, Dr. Gail Berlin emphasized that "Pennsylvania DCNR (Department of Conservation and Natural Resources) notes that 'the Old-Growth Network has a goal to locate and designate at least one protected forest in every county in the United States. Currently in Pennsylvania, 24 of its 67 counties contain a designated forest.' It would be thrilling to be the 25th designated county. It would be thrilling to know that children now would, in 50 years, be able to show to their children and grandchildren, a true old-growth forest in their hometown."

In addition, 65 percent of those supporting the plan commented on the importance of ensuring this natural area forest matures naturally.

Dr. Joan Maloof, founder and former executive director of the Old Growth Forest Network, commented on the draft plan. Maloof, who has reviewed hundreds of forest stewardship plans said the plan is "the best I have ever seen produced by a citizen committee."

The critical importance of preservation of the forest canopy, stewardship driven by public input including FWW, leaving all dead wood in the forest, relying on least-intrusive management, protecting at-risk species, and strictly prohibiting cutting trees were all specific draft stewardship plan elements drawn into special

focus by those who provided input.

Many citizens also expressed special support for the White Township Stewardship Committee's recognition of the important role that White's Woods plays in helping to mitigate climate change and regulate stormwater in our increasingly volatile climate.

After the plan was posted, FWW alerted the public to the draft plan's availability for review and public input. FWW sent letters to our most active members, posted a notice on Facebook, ran an article in our newsletter, hosted the White Township manager for a February webinar where he reviewed the plan, and spent a few days at the 12th entrance to speak with visitors to the woods.

White's Woods regular visitors, long-term and new township and borough residents, and regional citizens who drive to walk in our woods and provided public input, deserve thanks! In whichever way that these citizens provided input, they made sure that public participation in the draft stewardship plan review was exceptionally high. In comparison, only 39 citizens provided public feedback to the township's Comprehensive Plan Update. The White's Woods Nature Center is the gem of our community. Special thanks to all who found the time to support its long-term protection.

The White Township Stewardship Committee will meet on May 2, at 6:30 p.m. in the White Township Municipal Building to review the public input and consider any revisions to the draft plan. Please be there!



Black-capped Chickadee: *The chickadee pictured above is one of many birds in our area labeled at-risk.*

Regional Birds Declining in Numbers

The 2001 U.S. Fish and Wildlife report, [Birds of Conservation Concern](#), first sounded the alarm about the plummeting population of migratory forest birds that was recently underscored by the North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI) and the Cornell Ornithology Lab in their reports: Many of the most threatened species are the ones that we previously identified as among those most commonly seen.

Among the at-risk birds of conservation concern identified in the U.S. Fish & Wildlife report in our region (the Appalachian region), are the black-capped chickadee, red-headed woodpecker, wood thrush, chimney swift, common nighthawk, Eastern whip-poor-will, and Cerulean warbler. Birds common to this area but more generally at-risk include the scarlet tanager, veery, and rose-breasted grosbeak.

The NABCI's 2022 State of the Birds reports that almost half of North America's bird populations are in decline with 70 species being at a "tipping point" due to a loss of half their breeding populations in the last 50 years. The beloved rufous hummingbird is one of these "tipping point" species. Even red-winged blackbirds and dark-eyed juncos, once among the most common forest migratory birds, are experiencing precipitous population declines. There are more than 25 percent fewer birds in North America than could be found 50 years ago.

Forest fragmentation, land-use decisions, and climate change are cited as major factors threatening North American birds.

UPCOMING WEBINARS AND EVENTS

April 6: Barberry Pulling Contest. One Day Only. Put together your team of 10 people. (*Send email to info@friendsofwhiteswoods.org to register your team.*)

April 22: Earth Day Indiana, Film Fest at Indiana Theater, 6 to 9 p.m. Environmental Groups will have tables in lobby. Free. Open to the public.

May 2: Stewardship Committee meeting, 6:30 p.m., White Township Municipal building

May 9: Trees in White's Woods: A Walk, Dale Luthringer, DCNR education specialist, Cook State Forest. 5 p.m. 12th Street Entrance

For more information, visit: friendsofwhiteswoods.org

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Celebrate Earth Day Indiana April 22 Indiana Theater

A **free** 2024 Earth Day Indiana film festival will be held April 22nd from 6 to 9 p.m. at the Indiana Theater, 637 Philadelphia Street. Environmental groups will be there to offer information about their work. All of the films emphasize the importance of individual and collaborative efforts.

The one-hour feature film, “A Fierce Green Fire,” narrated by Robert Redford, Ashley Judd, Van Jones, Isabelle Allende, and Meryl Streep, will be shown at 6:30 p.m. A triumphant film that spans over 50 years of grassroots and global activism, the cautionary film connects the major causes of environmental degradation from pollution and environmental destruction to climate change. Chronicling the largest movement of the 20th century, the film tells vivid stories about people fighting – and succeeding – against the odds, from the Grand Canyon to Love Canal, from the oceans to the Amazon.

At 8 p.m., three short films will be shown: “Burned: Are Trees the New Coal?” “The Story of Stuff,” and “Brazil’s Warrior

Women.” These films look at biomass, mass consumption, and the success of indigenous women in protecting their land.

Participating organizations include the Center for Community Growth, Chevy Chase Food Forest, Evergreen Conservancy, Federation of Democratic Women of Indiana County, Friends of White’s Woods, Indiana Community Garden, Indiana County Conservation District, Indiana County Humane Society, IUP Sustainability Studies, League of Women Voters of Indiana County, and the Sierra Club -- Allegheny Group. Event sponsors include the Center for Community Growth, the Indiana Community Garden, Friends of White’s Woods, the Federation of Democratic Women of Indiana County, and individual sponsors Dr. Gail Berlin, Jenifer Christman, and Norma Tarnoff.

Earth Day Indiana is part of the international annual April 22nd Earth Day celebration. It is time to act. Together. Join us at the Indiana Theater on Monday, April 22nd at 6 p.m. (Films start at 6:30 p.m.)

May 9 Tree Walk to Emphasize Big Trees in White’s Woods

Department of Conservation and Natural Resources environmental education specialist Dale Luthringer will lead a big-tree walk in White’s Woods on May 9. The walk will start at the White’s Woods 12th Street entrance at 5 p.m. and last about 90 minutes.

Luthringer, who is a member of the Cook Forest State Park staff, spent some time in White’s Woods earlier this year to identify some of our Nature Center’s biggest trees. He found tulip poplars, northern red oaks, black oaks, and black cherry trees with circumferences ranging from 6 to 12.6 feet. Most of these trees are from 100 to 125 feet tall. The tallest tree he found in White’s Woods towers above our forest at over 145 feet.

He estimated the ages of the trees that he measured. Three of the oldest trees were estimated to be 175-200 years old. On this walk, Luthringer will take us to big trees that he found and will answer questions about measuring trees and about the characteristics of old-growth forests.

Deer Exclosures to Combat Deer Browse in White’s Woods

White’s Woods will soon host its first deer exclosure. The small fenced area will be located in a canopy gap that was created last year when a very large tulip poplar came down in a storm. This new canopy gap is near the White’s Woods/IUP College Lodge boundary at the top of the Fleming Trail.

White Township is working with Dr. Mike Tyree, IUP associate professor of biology, and students to set up this demonstration plot that will allow comparison of native species growth inside and outside of the protected area.

Small deer exclosures have been used in the Eastern United States for at least 20 years in both public parks and forests, including many managed by DCNR. Deer populations across Pennsylvania have been rising, and deer have a taste for native plants and tree seedlings. Oak seedlings and saplings are particularly palatable to these forest animals. The large num-



Deer Exclosure Effects on Deer Browse:

These fences protect the understory from deer browse, allowing the forest floor to regenerate native plants and tree seedlings. Forest and ecology experts tout exclosures as the most effective way to eliminate deer browse. Note the lush growth on the protected side of the fence.

bers of deer may have contributed to the changing patterns of forest regeneration in Pennsylvania from mostly oak-hickory to red maple.

The deer exclosure fencing will provide the chance for vulnerable tree seedlings to mature enough to be safe from hun-

gry deer. Other native plants within the fencing will also get the chance to mature. In addition, the exclosures may allow maturation of some native species that seem to have disappeared from our forest: Some species may have persisted underground as seeds and, when given the chance, may once again germinate, survive, and grow.

Deer exclosures are routinely installed in Pennsylvania state forests to promote hardwood forest and understory plant regeneration. DCNR reports that some fenced areas “quickly show dramatic differences from areas outside the fence while others take longer to yield results.”

Since 2020, FWW has been encouraging the use of deer-exclosures to help offset excessive deer-browse in White’s Woods. Thanks to White Township and Dr. Tyree, we will get to see how well deer exclosures can work to promote regeneration of tree saplings, shrubs, and native plants in White’s Woods.

For more information, visit: friendsofwhiteswoods.org

We welcome feedback. Email us at:
info@friendsofwhiteswoods.org

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