Friends of White's Woods

Monthly Newsletter

DECEMBER



DCNR RELEASES NEW CLIMATE PLAN

"By the end of the century, Pennsylvania temperatures will likely be similar to those in Arkansas today," according to the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation & Natural Resources (DCNR) *2026 Climate Action Plan.* Our local children, should they stay in the region, will live out their middle age in a very different weather zone.

DCNR focused on a "higher" greenhouse-gas-emissions-scenario (assuming continued or even increased reliance on fossil fuel, as is the current course) to prepare and manage risk under the most severe possible future impacts of climate change.

Climate change is already transforming Pennsylvania, and increases in temperature and precipitation are expected to continue to increase rapidly. Average annual temperature has already risen (*see figure, right*) and hot days in our region—above 90°--are expected to number 60 to 80 per year by 2070 (see *CAP*. p. 6). Patterns of precipitation across the state are "expected to change because as the climate warms it fundamentally alters how water moves through the atmosphere and landscape." We are likely to see an increase in average annual precipitation, extreme precipitation events, and drought. Heavy downpours are projected to increase by 60%.

DCNR's goals include both mitigation (agency reduction of greenhouse gas production) and adaptation. The agency is working to preserve, in some form, Pennsylvania's recreation opportunities, infrastructure, lakes, streams, and forests.

DCNR recognizes that the ongoing rise in carbon dioxide is the "primary driver" of climate change. Abrupt transition to clean energy use could significantly limit climate change impact.

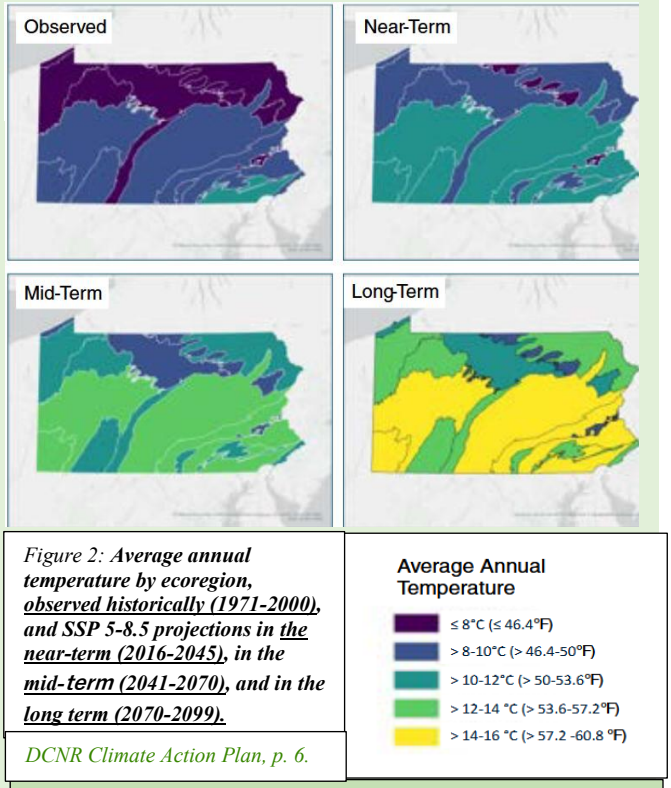


Figure 2: ***Average annual temperature by ecoregion, observed historically (1971-2000), and SSP 5-8.5 projections in the near-term (2016-2045), in the mid-term (2041-2070), and in the long term (2070-2099).***

DCNR Climate Action Plan, p. 6.

Climate Change and the WWNC

Pennsylvania forests, including White's Woods, are changing due to increased temperature and precipitation. Many animals, reptiles, plant and tree species will have to migrate north in order to survive.

The good news is that many of the most prominent tree species in our Nature Center, including tulip poplar, red maple, and northern red oak, are likely to be able to adapt to the changing temperatures, according to climate change predictions for individual tree species. Some tree species in our forests, including conifers, are far less likely to thrive.

Unfortunately, invasive plants are likely to become an ever-greater problem due to their ability to thrive in hotter, drier weather and longer growing seasons (*CAP*, p.28). Native plants are likely to suffer.

Shifting seasonal cycles create additional problems. Unusually warm winter days result in early bud formation and leave trees vulnerable to repeated frosts.

Migrating forest songbirds arrive in our area up to 24 days earlier than in the past, but researchers fear that they will not be able to keep up with climate change.

UPCOMING FWW EVENTS

SATURDAYS: Invasive Plant Removal Weather permitting.
Sign up at the FWW website and watch your email.

January 28, 2027: Native Bats: Thriving & At-Risk. Bat Conservation and Management, Inc., John Chenger

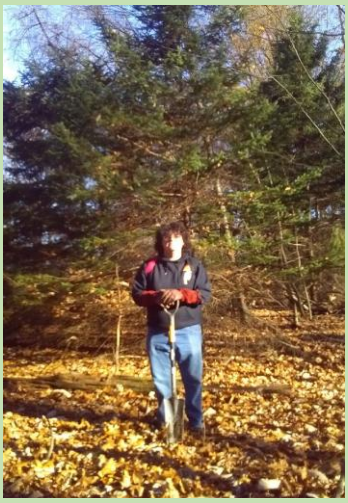
See the monthly *Naturally* column, presented by **The Indiana Gazette and FWW to showcase the wonders of nature in our area.**

***Classical Variations*: IUP 90.1 FM, Sundays, 1-3 p.m., host FWW Board member Tom Miller.**

EASTERN COTTONTAIL RABBITS



Though Eastern Cottontail rabbits are often seen in yards, in the forest they are mostly known by their tracks in the snow. The cottontail population was highest in Pennsylvania in the early part of the 20th century after our forests were cleared. These rabbits are mostly active at night and can be speedy when escaping predators, hopping up to 17 mph. They have eyes that protrude a bit from their heads, "giving them almost 260-degree vision."



Fall 2026 Tree Planting in WWNC

After helping to remove invasive Japanese barberry for six weekends, FWW volunteers planted trees in both October and November. Eighty-five trees, both deciduous and conifers, were planted in White's Woods this fall. Ten different tree species got their start in 2026. LEFT: Tree-planter Aidan Gardner in front of conifers planted by FWW volunteers over 20 years ago to provide a screen for one of the gas wells in the woods.

ONE OF THE NATURE CENTER'S NEWER INVASIVE PLANTS: BURNING BUSH

Though undeniably striking, those red-leafed shrubs that can be found in White's Woods right now are not, in the end, welcome guests! Burning bush, or winged euonymus, has been a popular landscaping plant (as has Japanese barberry). But once it escapes into a forest, it can be "a significant threat." According to the Penn State Extension, while small invasions (of small plants), can be removed manually, control of this plant usually requires "the hack & squirt" technique that involves painting the hacked stem with herbicide. Go Native! Plant native plants!



Photo: Eric Burkhart. Penn State Extension

LAME-DUCK CONGRESS MOVES QUICKLY TO FINALIZE BILLS THAT WEAKEN ENVIRONMENTAL & WILDLIFE PROTECTION (before the new Congress is inaugurated next January)

- The misleadingly named **Bipartisan American Affordability and Jobs Act (BAAJA)** speeds the industry permitting process by significantly weakening the Clean Air, Clean Water, and Endangered Species Act and restricting public input and judicial review. Climate scientists oppose the bill, along with a very long list of environmental and political organizations. (Here is one petition opposing BAAJA.)
- The proposed Senate Farm Bill is also widely opposed, because it weakens foundational environmental laws, neuters pesticide protections, and threatens forests.

OTHER NATIONAL & LOCAL NEWS:

- Seven lawsuits have been filed in an attempt to block the new rule stipulating that habitat destruction does not inflict harm on endangered species. BAAJA (above) moves toward codifying this rule.
- The Roadless Rule rollback is still moving forward, despite a huge public outcry. HR 3930 offers permanent protection for roadless areas in national forests.
- To learn more about our community's (Indiana County's) plan to massively increase fossil fuel use—fracked gas to power the planned largest AI datacenter in the U.S.—visit Concerned Residents of Western Pennsylvania (CROW).

It is time to renew your FWW membership! **Support FWW community education, research, and ongoing projects to protect the woods. Continue your efforts to save White's Woods and give everyone you know the *perfect holiday gift*: the wonderful, new FWW t-shirt!**