



Friends of White's Woods Monthly Newsletter



December

Deer Exlosures To Make Appearance in White's Woods



Deer enclosure fencing is used to protect parcels of a forest that have been damaged by deer browse. The fence allows tree seeds and native plants to thrive and restores the forest to a more natural state.

White Township will experiment with deer enclosure fencing in designated parts of White's Woods where excessive deer browse has suppressed native plant and tree seedling growth on the forest floor. The designated places for the fencing will be where there are naturally occurring canopy gaps: where trees or tree tops have fallen due to high winds or other natural occurrences. The resultant canopy gap creates increased light and moisture on the forest floor that allows for normal forest regeneration of both plant communities and trees in a maturing forest.

Dr. Mike Tyree, an IUP associate professor of plant ecology, in a letter from spring 2023, outlined a plan: "I view these disturbances as an opportunity to move White's Woods towards a more uneven-aged forest." We can achieve this goal, in part, "by carefully selecting the plant species to replace in these small forest gaps."

"This also provides an opportunity for outreach. We can set up research plots in these areas that can be used to inform

future decisions about plant selection, fences, invasive plant control, etc. Due to their high visibility, they could also be used to educate the public about forest systems and the role of disturbance. An example of the types of treatments that could be positioned in these gaps are: deer exclusion fencing, invasive control, fencing + invasive control, and a do nothing reference plot."

Soon visitors to White's Woods may be able to view the regeneration of native plants and a new crop of trees.



Deer Fencing Results: *This photo from Valley Forge, shows the results of deer fencing enclosures. The left of the photo shows unprotected areas subject to deer browse. The right side shows the return of native vegetation when protected from deer browse.*

Future Plans: Removing More Barberrry

While we don't want to hurry past the glorious winter months, like any good people of the land, we need to plan for spring. Japanese barberry starts to green-up two to three weeks earlier than most native plants, and we want to be there to greet -- and remove -- it! We need 10 teams of 10 people each to spend one hour in late March or early April (TBD) in a communitywide so-long-to-barberry celebration. FWW will provide two teams and will assist new teams with identifying the barberry, modeling removal (just pull it!), and where to leave the filled bags. Work gloves will be provided. FWW is working on ways to make this event interesting (Prizes? Competition? Food?). Please contact info@friendsofwhiteswoods.org ASAP if you can help this spring, either as an individual or as part of a team.

Forty people, including FWW, Scout Troop #1011; the semi-pro football team, the Crusaders; and students from the IUP departments of anthropology and geology, working across numerous one-hour sessions since last July, have removed about 120 large bags of Japanese barberry from White's Woods. In some cases, given that many of the plants are as small as 6 inches, dozens of plants have been removed in a single bag. Without a doubt, at least 1,000 to 2,000 barberry plants have been removed from the Nature Center by dedicated volunteers, clearing space for native plants. Japanese barberry, now banned as a "noxious weed" in Pennsylvania, is a prolific invader that changes soil chemistry and takes over and disrupts native ecosystems with its "dense, prickly thickets," according to the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture.

If we work fast, we can stop the spread of barberry in White's Woods and clear it from delicate, central parts of the forest before it becomes increasingly dense. Please help. Even the birds will thank you!

UPCOMING WEBINARS AND EVENTS

Dec. 21: Stewardship Committee Meeting, 6:30 p.m., White Township Municipal Building *Date changed to Monday for this meeting only.*

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Stewardship Plan Nears Completion; Old Growth Forest Network Part of Final Draft

Will Radell at the Nov. 13th White Township Stewardship Committee meeting urged the committee to focus more strongly on preservation, noting that children growing up today have no idea what a forest would look like if it was left undisturbed. If left alone, White's Woods will provide this now all-too-rare opportunity for our region's future generations.

Committee chairperson Barbara Hauge noted that Dave Dahlheimer had requested a substitution of the word "preservation" for the word "conservation" in two places in the Goals and Objectives. Dahlheimer explained that to some, the word "conservation" implies managing property for future resource use, wherein the word "preservation" is understood to mean protection. After some discussion, the committee agreed to the change.

Rick Ritenour urged the committee to "prohibit" removal of trees in White's Woods, rather than "strictly limit" tree removal, as the current draft now states. The current draft, said Ritenour, is too vague.

Sierra Davis expressed concern about the reference in the current draft of Goals and Objectives to "strictly limit the removal of

trees." Noting that she was the author of the phrase, Davis observed that, as written, the goal fails to reflect the committee's intent and, because of its opacity, fails to fully address public concern. Nowhere in the committee's draft plan is there discussion of removing a single tree, Davis explained. In subsequent discussion, Township Manager Chris Anderson observed that only rarely do trees present a risk along trails. Hauge asserted that they might want to make sure to leave open an option to remove a diseased tree to prevent disease spread. All agreed that all downed wood is to remain in the forest under any circumstances; that risk trees along trails are rare; and that dead and dying trees in the rest of the forest are an essential part of forest regeneration and ecosystem health. Davis and Dahlheimer agreed to re-work the phrase "strictly limit the removal of trees" to better reflect committee intent and address public concern. Anderson noted that the intent to protect the trees would also be clear if White's Woods is enrolled in the Old Growth Forest Network (OGFN) or the Natural Heritage Area is expanded to envelop a larger portion of the Nature Center. He

observed that enrolling White's Woods in the OGFN seems consistent with the committee's goals and, in that way, appears to be a good option. Anderson noted that he had reviewed the sample ordinance provided by the OGFN and thought that such an ordinance might be workable for the township.

At Davis' request, the committee discussed the draft Deer Management section prepared by Matt Klunk and Jeff Geesey. Klunk said that the current draft tried to provide background information, to identify all of the options for deer management, and to acknowledge public input. Dahlheimer, noting that DCNR had requested a long-term stewardship plan, of which deer management is a central concern, suggested that it was important that specific deer management recommendations be cited. Klunk indicated that he did not think that the recommendations should be prescriptive and suggested that he would be hesitant to make some recommendations because of potential costs. Hauge said that she believed the committee should make recommendations based on available expert and public input and that while the implementation might be limited by costs, the overall plan recommendations should not. Davis observed that it seemed clear in the current draft that some recommendations were favored over others. It would be good, Davis suggested, to spell these out for the final draft. Hauge agreed that the deer management recommendations were not clear. Klunk agreed to rewrite the recommendations with Hauge's assistance for the final draft, which is to be reviewed at the committee's final meeting in December.

The committee decided to post the completed draft plan for public review for 90 days. The draft will be posted shortly after Jan. 1 and will be sent to key stakeholders including Indiana Borough, the Indiana County Planning Commission and IUP. Following receipt of public input, the committee will meet to revise the plan as necessary. The final draft will be sent to DCNR for review. Emails commenting on the Goals and Objectives have been received from Ellen Chinn, Gail Berlin, Ellen Yerger, Dana Driscoll and Radell.

Hauge noted that some maps may be modified with color coding to make them both more attractive and easier to read.

Dahlheimer volunteered to write Future Plans and Goals and the Summary of Recommendations. Dahlheimer and Davis will work together to complete the plan section regarding climate change. The remainder of the unwritten sections on the outline, such as "parking," will be addressed briefly in a summary paragraph.

What's Next?

Three steps remain for the White's Woods Stewardship Plan that involve the public.

First, at the Dec. 21st meeting of the Stewardship Committee, the committee will consider specific recommendations for deer management, including fencing to protect plants and seedlings and the utility and advisability of recreational hunting. The committee will finalize their recommendations for such things as the protection of trees and at-risk species, dog and bicycle policies, and the role of the public in future management.

Please read the drafts at "whitetownship.org." Find the Stewardship Committee web page (under "Government"), and scroll down to the "compilation" link that is near the page bottom.

And attend the Dec. 21st, 6:30 p.m., committee meeting to raise your questions.

Second, comes the important 90-day public review period. The draft plan for our regional forest that is tentatively approved at the Dec. 21st meeting will be posted for 90 days to invite public comment. FWW will be studying the plan, and everyone who is concerned about the woods should do this, too! Even if the plan is perfect, the committee needs your feedback! If the draft can be improved, the Stewardship Committee will definitely need your input. FWW will tell you what we see in the next (January) FWW newsletter and will also let you know

how to find the draft plan and how you can provide your feedback to the township. If you see things in the draft plan that FWW should be studying, please be sure to send your comments via email to info@friendsofwhiteswoods.org.

Finally, at the end of the 90-day review period, the Stewardship Committee will meet to revise the draft plan in consideration of the input received. This is one more important step that requires public participation.

In their March 21, 2021, letter to White Township, DCNR emphasized that "as [White's Woods is] a community-owned forest, we believe it is critical for the township to understand the wishes and desires of its residents, and most importantly, identifying and understanding the values citizens hold and expect of these woodlands. Values include concepts like sense of place, peace and solitude, recreation, aesthetics, health and wellness, access, wildlife habitat, water quality, air quality, and revenue generation—how do the various tracts contribute to the community's quality of life."

We need to do our part to see that future care of White's Woods reflects these values and that WWNC is allowed to continue to contribute, as it has for over a century, to our community's quality of life.

Participate and protect White's Woods!

For more information, visit: friendsofwhiteswoods.org

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

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