



Friends of White's Woods
PO Box 1271
Indiana, PA 15701

June 19, 2026

Sara,

It was nice walking with you and Rick today.

I can understand the alumni, student, public, and FWW's concerns regarding the timber marking that is occurring on the (IUP) Student Cooperative Association property adjacent to Whites Woods (WW). As you know, forests and their functions do not respect property lines and the Student Cooperative Association (SCA) property and Whites Woods certainly share an incredible forest that has innumerable benefits. Similar to WW, the SCA forest is unique in that it contains abundant large trees and offers an aesthetic that is incredible. Mature forests like WW and SCA are becoming hard to find and to have these adjacent properties combining and even multiplying their individual benefits is a win-win. Recreationally and aesthetically, the forest that spans these two properties is practically indistinguishable and, for our area, the combined forest has what I would consider to be the highest recreational and aesthetic value possible. At almost every turn in the great trail system, it's easy to be awed by more incredible and beautiful large trees. In addition, the habitat benefit to wildlife of this combined forest is certainly multiplied by these two properties both being large and adjacent to each other. Mature forests have complex branching systems, abundant cavity trees, increased capacity for vernal pools, and abundant nutrient cycling that is not commonly found in our area. The large expanse of mature forest found in WW and SCA add a tremendous benefit to the diversity of habitats found in the Indiana region. In short, WW benefits from the SCA forest and SCA benefits from the WW forest. And, the human enjoyers and wildlife inhabitants of the combined forest have increased benefits. As I said, I can understand FWW's concern for this beautiful neighboring property.

One of the documents you sent yesterday stated the purpose of the SCA harvest plan by listing the project phases as follows:

The project has four phases; the current phase, assessment and survey work, is underway.

Phases two through four include:

- Hazardous tree identification removal and mitigation along trails, roadways and commonly used areas
- Trail maintenance, including clearing and grading and drainage improvements.
- Vegetation management along trails to improve visibility, safety and user experience
- Selective thinning and pruning to improve forest health, aesthetics and sightlines and invasive species control within trail corridors and adjacent forest areas
- Erosion control and soil stabilization along existing trails, using best management practices
- Debris removal and cleanup related to storm damage
- Aesthetic improvements to enhance the visual quality and natural character of the forested landscape.

Each one of the phases, as listed, seem to contain action items that could be considered admirable. Of course there are hazard trees that should be addressed. Of course, trails should be maintained. Of course, non-native invasive species (NNIS) should be targeted. Of course, forest health and aesthetics should be a concern. Of course, storm damage should be addressed when it's interrupting normal use of the property.

However, after walking many miles of the SCA property and looking at hundreds of high value trees that have been marked and designated for harvest, there is the appearance that a vast number of these marked trees have been chosen for their individual and overall market value and not directly for the purpose of meeting the stated goals. The decision to harvest the vast majority of the marked trees seems to only fit into bullet point #4 above..."selective thinning." This is the only category/phase where most of the marked trees can fit. Harvesting high value trees that are located hundreds and hundreds of feet from any trail, building, road, pavilion, etc could not fit into bullet point #1. Neither can most of the trees planned for harvest fit into bullet points #2, #3, #5, #6, or #7. The vast majority of harvest decisions can only fit into #4. The stated purpose of bullet point #4 is "selective thinning" is to "improve forest health, aesthetics, and sightliness." However, the common theme, from what I saw, was to mark A LOT of large, marketable trees.

I am certainly not saying that SCA can't have a goal to generate revenue from their forest. I am just saying that it appears the timber harvest decisions (based on painted trees) do not link up with SCA's stated goals. And, I am also saying that harvesting all those painted trees will actually detract from SCA's ability to accomplish some of their stated goals. Will harvesting all the painted trees improve forest health? No. Will harvesting all the painted trees improve aesthetics? No. Will harvesting all the painted trees improve sightliness? NO. Will harvesting all the painted trees enhance visual quality? No. Will harvesting all the painted trees enhance the natural character of the forest landscape? No. However, I will say, there are probably 25 local loggers/timber buyers that would have a very strong desire to harvest all the painted trees, which would also create a great deal of revenue for SCA.

As you may know, I do earn part of my living from selling trees - typically as part of an overall forest management plan that spans 10+ years. I am not against timber harvesting and its potential benefits. However, there are some properties that should be treated very cautiously. WW is a perfect example of a property where typical forest management practices are tough to navigate. WW is much more of a park than it is a working forest. Similarly, I would put the SCA forest into the same category - it is also more a park than it is a working forest. But, even in a working forest, the harvest prescriptions should match up with the landowner's goals. I regularly explain to landowners the fact that there are only 2 categories of proper timber harvesting...thinning and regeneration. When thinning, the focus must be on giving the best trees more room. Thinning some less dominant trees adjacent to a dominant tree will give the dominant tree the ability to expand its crown, create more leaves, create more energy for itself, and grow faster. This is the purpose of thinning. Here are some ways you can tell if a thinning is being done correctly...1) average stand diameter increases 2) average tree quality will increase. Conversely, an improper partial harvest will decrease average diameter by primarily cutting the large trees and decrease tree quality by primarily cutting the highest grade/highest value trees. Since SCA's stated goal #4 specifically mentions "thinning" it would be an important endeavor for SCA to actually determine if their plan to harvest all the painted trees will 1) increase or decrease average stand diameter? and 2) increase or decrease average tree quality? For anyone who really wants to know these answers, I think it will be easy to determine what the results will be. If average stand diameter will decrease and if average tree quality will decrease as a result of a planned harvest, it is NOT thinning. Instead, it is a version of improper harvesting that will degrade the forest, decrease productivity, and decrease many forest benefits.

Regarding hazard trees, I would recommend SCA work with a Certified Arborist who is trained to judge risk related to trees. Certified Arborists follow a strict and lengthy process to judge each and every individual tree and rank their potential for hazard. Some hazards can be fully eliminated by simply pruning one branch and there are also times when tree removal is necessary. However, it is my opinion that only a Certified Arborist should make the determination of hazard and prescribe a solution for each tree. Certified Arborists are specially licensed and insured for this work and must adhere to a standard hazard tree assessment protocol. Certified Arborists are also independent when it comes to the market value of the trees they assess. While a logger or timber buyer may have some knowledge and experience with hazardous trees, in my opinion, they are not qualified, licensed, or insured for hazard tree analysis and there may be a conflict of interest where they are able to sell all or most of the trees they deem hazardous.

If SCA has a goal to create revenue from the forest and also a desire to protect the unique character of the property, they could consider having a discussion with the Family Forest Carbon Program. I have clients that are being paid to let their forest grow.

If SCA has a fear related to hazard trees, they should contact a Certified Arborist for an assessment. Additionally, SCA should consider an insurance plan that is specifically related to this subject.

Thanks again for the tour. Let me know if you would like any more information or clarification related to any of these topics.

Mike

Mike Wolf
(814) 659-1280