



# Friends of White's Woods, Inc.

P.O. Box 1271  
Indiana, PA 15701

December 20, 2022

White Township Board of Supervisors  
950 Indian Springs Road  
Indiana, PA 15701

Dear Supervisors Lenz, Gemmel, McCauley, Gallo, and Gillette:

In an open letter published in the Indiana Gazette on December 10, 2022, White Township Board of Supervisors Chair George Lenz urged Friends of White's Woods (FWW) to take a bigger, more active role in the management of the White's Woods Nature Center.

We would be very pleased to do so and to continue to assist the Township Stewardship Committee, as well.

Management of a natural area has become ever-more challenging, in part because we are learning so much more about the complexity of forests and, in part, because circumstances, over the years, have changed. Experts now conceptualize a forest as a complex set of interlocking ecosystems including soil, plants, fungi, trees, animals, invertebrates, reptiles, amphibians, bird populations, geological and hydrologic features, and more.

Just recently, DCNR and the Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program have begun to focus on the special importance of fungi and the underground plant/tree nutrient-distribution network (the mycelium network) in forest protection and management. Current and ongoing changes in regional temperatures and precipitation patterns have added extra layers of concern. Tree species, along with mammals, amphibians, and reptiles are migrating north in response to changing weather. Important species have shown dramatic decline: It has been documented, for instance, that the migrating eastern forest songbird population has declined by over 33% in the past fifty years. The Appalachian "channel" for migration of various species is narrowing due to climatic changes and natural areas such as White's Woods may, as a result, play a critical role in the viability of this channel. Heavy rain events, which have increased by 70% in the Northeast, require ever-more attention to stormwater management. Local and regional carbon absorption by older forests has become of increasing importance and concern, not just for our local area, but for our entire region. Invasive species, a problem first identified in the United States as early as 1750, continue to spread with increased globalization and changes in weather patterns. While there is concern that some species populations are over-abundant, the list of Pennsylvania endangered, vulnerable, and at-risk species continues to grow.

Friends of White's Woods has worked hard over a number of years to locate expert consultants to help to educate ourselves and the public on these and other critical issues that underscore the importance of protecting our natural area. We have learned how crucial it is to support natural forest maturation processes. FWW is positioned to provide important assistance.

For instance, FWW has established a working relationship with the director of Hartley Wood of the Penn State Arboretum, a natural area that received grant monies to install deer exclosure fencing. And we have also been in touch with the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy (WPC), an organization that works closely with DCNR and is very willing to provide information whenever possible. This organization recently prepared a management plan relying on deer exclosure fencing for Allegheny County's South Park.

Penn State University staff who have been central to research about products and "delivery methods" for deer contraception have also taken the time for conversation with FWW.

One way that FWW could assume a larger role in White's Woods Nature Center care is to double the size of the current White Township Stewardship Committee, adding five members of Friends of White's Woods who are particularly well-informed about how to gather resources to address such problems as those listed above.

There are other ways that White Township could tap into resources and management strategies that the Township may not have the interest or the capacity to pursue, as well. Both of these options would rely on the assistance of Land Conservancies, nonprofit organizations that serve as stewards for land protection. Since 1932, for instance, the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy has protected over a quarter million acres, including forests and natural areas. To work with a conservancy:

- a. White Township could maintain continued ownership of White's Woods subject to a conservation easement or a long-term lease held by a regional conservancy that would manage White's Woods in coordination with DCNR; or,
- b. White Township could transfer White's Woods to a regional conservancy with FWW and the conservancy assuming any transfer costs or statutory penalties arising from the transfer (with the approval of the Commonwealth).

In closing we will note that, as you know, the long-term preservation of our natural area is the primary mission of our organization. We look forward to providing additional assistance.

Sincerely,

Board of Directors,  
Friends of White's Woods