Supervisors OK White's Woods timbering plan

By JAN WOODARD

FOR THE DISPATCH

INDIANA--Despite a thousand opposing signatures, the White Township supervisors voted Wednesday to approve a controversial plan for managing White's Woods Nature Center through selective timbering.

To the vocal dismay of about 50 people packed into the township board room, the supervisors voted unanimously in favor of the plan designed by forester Dave Babyak.

The vote came just two days after a lengthy meeting held for public comment drew an overflow crowd to the central area of the township's S & T Bank Arena. Many, wearing Friends of White's Woods (FWW) T-shirts, listed reasons they found the plan flawed.

On Wednesday, Supervisor Gail McCauley, who said she initiated commissioning the management plan, moved to accept it with the stipulation that it may be modified at the discretion of the supervisors.

Prior to the vote, Indiana resident Brian Cope, of FWW, read a resolution from the group proposing the supervisors reject Babyak's plan and form a commission of experts and FWW members to recommend a management plan that would treat the forest as a nature reserve and conservation area. The proposal also asked the supervisors to pass a motion opposing any future plans that may call for timbering of White's Woods unless recommended by the commission and approved by citizens of both Indiana Borough and White Township.

Susan Comfort and others held signs that read, "White's Woods is not a tree farm."

"I don't view this as tree farming, but as a way to save White's Woods," responded McCauley. "What will become of White's Woods if we don't take good care of it?"

Supervisor Gene Gemmell seconded McCauley's motion. He said he walked through the woods and found un-addressed problems: "I looked around and found it deplorable, all those (dead) trees from gypsy moths rotting, and to no use."

Gemmell said he also found Tree-of-Heaven, an invasive species, growing in the woods. "It will take over, if not treated properly," he said, adding "junk trees" such as aspen hinder the growth of oaks and other larger trees.

Gemmell also expressed concern over dead trees near hiking trails. Gemmell said he has heard from some members of FWW who said they don't walk the trails on windy days Woods • From Al

for fear of falling trees.

"Somebody's going to get hurt" if the supervisors take no action, Gemmell predicted.

One of the surprises of the night was when Supervisor George Lenz suggested the township board look into selling White's Woods to FWW for \$300,000, to be paid over 20 years. "We won't be buying chain saws tomorrow or anything like that. I would like to see you folks and others like you buy White's Woods off of us and be the guardians of it," he said.

Supervisor Robert Overdorff said, "He (Babyak) gave us a very good plan and we owe him our appreciation. But I am opposed to immediately implementing it."

Jerry Boucher, the remaining board member, said he agreed with Overdorff and supported the plan.

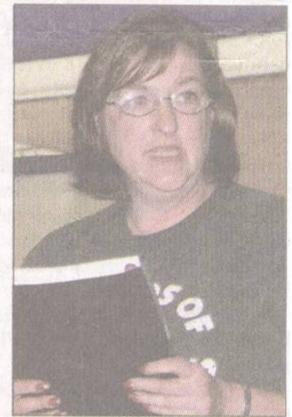
"We can't convince people this has never been a money issue. It's about the health of the forest and nothing less," McCauley said. "If it was unhealthy in 1995, it would stand to reason that it didn't heal itself."

Comfort said she has read the management plan and claims it contradicts itself. She said the plan states that the various units of the forest are healthy. "So why timber a healthy forest? If you proceed, I beg you, get the advice of a conservationist."

At Monday's session, those who opposed timbering or altering White's Woods in any way was Mary Lou Maneke, who has walked in White's Woods two hours a day for the last 38 years. "It's why I'm healthy. It's beautiful. I love that place. Why do anything?" she asked.

"I'm a friend of White's Woods, too," said Babyak, a 28-year township resident. "It's not my intent to devastate White's Woods, as inferred."

Following the meeting, Babyak said he designed a



IAN WOODARD/FOR THE DISPATCH

Susan Dahlheimer presented 1,000 petitions opposed to the tmbering plan.

similar plan that was implemented by Indiana County for Pine Ridge Park near Blairsville, with no apparent damage to that site.

Susan Dahlheimer presented the supervisors with over a thousand signatures, plus 50 e-mails opposing the

"The message is clear, we

oppose timbering White's Woods," she said, asking the Yerger said the value of the supervisors to work with woods is bigger than the com-FWW to manage the town- mercial value of the land and ship property in a way that is trees. "There are ten thousatisfactory to the majority of sand user hours, annually," residents.

missioned to design a plan ural amenities like Whites for the long term health of the Woods, Yerger noted. wooded section of White water, soil, historic sites, money through timbering. landscaping and the impact on surrounding areas, he tion of erosion causing damsaid.

said what happens to the peorecreation is equally important. "We need the woods for our mental and physical ter. health," she said. "You calm down when you go to the woods."

Along the same line, Dave he said. Communities com-Babyak said he was com- pete for firms looking for nat-

Township. He said the man- conception about the number decade. agement plan is about more and size of trees that will be tific methods to consider the purpose of the plan is to wooded property in the 90s. what is best for the trees, protect the woods, not to raise

He also addressed the quesage to homes below the woods cated beside the nature cen- with singular large trees.

erosion," he said.

Calling it an intervention, Babyak said, "If implemented, in 10 years it won't look a whole lot different; There will be more timber, volume then, than now."

Although the plan calls for, cutting trees over a 10-year period, Babyak said it would actually involve only 16-Babyak said there is a mis- weeks of timbering over the

Bill Woods of Home said than timbering. It uses scien- removed and reiterated that Babyak worked on his "You're a good man for whatyou do, but that's not what's needed here," he said to Babyak.

Bill Paxon, a forester for 50 Susan Zimny, who said she in Indiana borough. Babyak years who described himself. will be teaching environmen- said only .4 acres of timbered as a naturalist-at-large, tal psychology at Indiana land directly above the bor- spoke on behalf of FWW. "It's-University of Pennsylvania, ough would drain toward a marvelous plan, but it's for town, much less than the a park," he said, noting ple who use the woods for drainage that followed the de- White's Woods is a nature velopment of the homes lo- center and a forest, not a park

> With the plan under con-"Cutting trees doesn't cause sideration, tree removal will erosion. Bad roads causes result in "a terrible amount of secondary growth," he said.