



Friends of White's Woods, Inc.

P.O. Box 1271
Indiana, PA 15701

November 12, 2020

White Township Supervisors
950 Indian Springs Road
Indiana, PA 15701

Dear White Township Chairman Lenz and Supervisors Gemmell, McCauley, Gillette, and Gallo:

In the last six months, we have learned much about the unique value of the White's Woods Nature Center and about best-practices regarding its management, as well.

We have learned much about the control of invasive plant species:

- Adding light, by removing sections of the canopy, will result in the explosion of invasive plants on the forest floor.

This fact was first underscored by Appalachian Forest Consultant Mike Wolf in his June and July, 2020 assessments of White's Woods. It has since been affirmed by numerous additional experts, including those from The Western Pennsylvania Conservancy and The Pennsylvania Nature Conservancy. When the Millstone Plan to control invasive species by adding light to the forest floor was described to a forester who works with The Nature Conservancy, he responded, "That's exactly backwards!"

- There are a variety of means for removing invasive plants that are endorsed by DCNR and by experienced experts in this work.

DCNR has extensive literature regarding the management of invasive plant species. Among this agency's recommendations for control of invasive plants are (1) a lot of 'elbow grease' and (2) spot application of herbicides. We have also learned that professionals, in specific circumstances, are employing goats to help control invasive plants - even in forests and municipal lands. With time, and with a lot of work (for which community members have already volunteered), a "least-intrusive" approach to managing invasive plant species is not only possible, it promises to be ideal.

We have learned much about the condition and proper care of the soil (and, therefore, the trees) in White's Woods:

- Rototilling the forest's soil to a depth of six inches will result in enormous, irrevocable damage.

Again, Appalachian Forest Consultant Mike Wolf originally identified the fact that a significant percentage of tree roots lay in the top layers of soil. Rototilling soil will do damage or kill even large trees.

- There is no evidence that the soil in White's Woods is "compacted."

Soil Scientist Ron Andrasko, when informed of the history and condition of the trees in White's Woods, described that claim that the WW soil is compacted as "ludicrous." He added, also, that "only manipulation of forest soil results in compaction."

We have learned that the large deer population is the biggest obstacle to long-term forest regeneration.

Deer eat seedlings. But hunting, because of the size and range of Pennsylvania deer herds, is not at all likely to provide a solution to this problem. According to foresters and natural area managers all across Pennsylvania, the most effective solution is deer fencing. The most feasible plan is to fence small plots (1/4-acre) over an extended period of time. Deer contraception is another possibility that FWW will be exploring in the future.

We have learned that there is immense value in maintaining the White's Woods Nature Center as an area for "passive recreation" to be "left largely in its natural state":

- The DCNR 2020-2024 Outdoor Recreation Comprehensive Plan, which is aimed to increase outdoor recreation for all Pennsylvania citizens, of all ages and abilities, reports that the most popular outdoor recreation activity is walking. Birdwatching and cycling were identified as the second and third most popular outdoor activities.

As demonstrated by recent survey and petition data - as well as a walk in the Woods-- White's Woods is an irreplaceable, much-used resource for these three activities. The Township takes great pride in the recreational opportunities that it provides. The White's Woods Nature Center is, quite possibly, the most important recreational asset White Township manages, particularly in the midst of our global pandemic.

- Left intact, the 250-acre White's Woods forest will provide a steady stream of revenue for White Township via available carbon-capture projects.

Two carbon-sequestration revenue-producing projects are likely to be unrolled in Indiana County in Spring 2021, through programs sponsored by The Nature Conservancy, as well as a corporation that specializes in creating carbon-capture contracts for municipalities. This so-called "mailbox" money is available to those who leave their forests intact. The carbon capture market is rapidly expanding and numerous entities, including The Pennsylvania Forestry Association, DCNR, and Appalachian Forestry Consultant Mike Wolf have underscored the importance of taking advantage of this market.

- White's Woods provides an array of additional, economically quantifiable contributions to the citizens of White Township and the Indiana region.

Money is saved, and this savings can be quantified, as a forest helps to clean the air, control stormwater, and sequester carbon. One tree can absorb 40,000 gallons of stormwater per year, according to Penn State Extension Specialist Vincent Cotrone.

All that we have learned about White's Woods and its management in the last six months suggests that it would be both beneficial and expedient for the Township to withdraw the Millstone Plan from DCNR and work with community members, including Friends of White's Woods, to develop a long-range management plan for The White's Woods Nature Center to:

- Secure a long-term contract for carbon sequestration funds.
- Seek funding for an extended deer-fencing project to protect seedlings for long-term forest regeneration.
- Develop a "least-intrusive" invasive plant species treatment plan that relies on DCNR guidelines and, where possible, the good-will and hard work of volunteers.
- Realize the potential of the DCNR "Recreation for All" plan to bring more people into White's Woods for educational and recreational activities.

On behalf of the Friends of White's Woods Board of Directors,

Sara King, President
Friends of White's Woods

**Friends of White's Woods
2020-2021 Webinars***

**All webinars are free and open to the public. We would be very pleased if you could join us.
All webinars are from 4:00-5:00 p.m. on the dates indicated.**

- September 24, 2020 Gavin Deming, Allegheny Goatscape
Using Goats to Control Invasive Plant Species**
- October 22, 2020 Mike Wolf, Appalachian Forest Consultants
The Health of White's Woods**
- November 19, 2020 Vincent Cotrone, Penn State Extension
The Role of Trees & Forests in Controlling Stormwater**
- January 14, 2021 Dr. Margaret Brittingham, Penn State Department of
Ecosystem Science and Management
Community Forests: Benefits for Birds and People - Options and Challenges**
- February 11, 2021 Dr. Bonnie McGill, Carnegie Natural History Museum
Comfortable spaces for uncomfortable conversations: The Climate and Rural
Systems Partnership of Western Pennsylvania"**
- March 2021 (TBD) Kevin Yoder, The Nature Conservancy
Family Forest Carbon Capture Program**

***All FWW webinars have been/will be recorded and available on the FWW website:
friendsofwhiteswoods.org**