

Change.org Petition

The following petition was posted on Change.org from May 15 – July 15, 2020. It received nearly 8000 signatures and comments from 142 signatories.

Included in this document are signatures of **1240** individuals (see Appendix C) who reside in zip codes 15000-16999 (Western Pennsylvania), and are therefore within driving distance of WWNC, or are known to have formerly lived in the Indiana area, and in many cases still visit Indiana regularly.

Of the 1240 signatures, approximately **600** reside in zip code **15701 or 15705**, White Township, Indiana Borough, or IUP. Approximately 75 additional live within 15 minutes of WWNC, and approximately 175 additional live within an hour of WWNC.

Of the remaining signatures, over 1000 are from Eastern Pennsylvania, hundreds are from across the United States, and hundreds are from as far as Latin America, Europe, Asia, Africa, and even Australia.

It is clear from these data that people are concerned with protecting our natural areas. But most important, residents of Western Pennsylvania, Indiana County, and especially **White Township** do not want WWNC to be timbered or damaged by heavy equipment, both misguided attempts to “manage” the nature center.

Petition to Save White's Woods Nature Center

White's Woods Nature Center, located on the edge of Indiana, PA in White Township, is a 250 acre preserve that our entire community is able to enjoy. Unfortunately, the White Township Supervisors are proposing to engage in timber harvesting and rototilling, which would destroy our beautiful park--the logging will start in a matter of weeks.

Currently, the forester has marked nearly 700 trees on approximately 50 acres (20%) of the park (Phase I), representing over 50% of the trees in that area, and including mostly large, valuable trees which provide the park's canopy. For updates on our progress in stopping this devastation, go to: www.friendsofwhiteswoods.org

Please **SIGN OUR PETITION** to Save White's Woods Nature Center

Here is a list of concerns about the timbering plan:

- **Cutting and rototilling of the forest floor will begin in weeks.** While current plans for timbering have been in the works for over a year, the greater Indiana PA community only learned about it in mid-April when our members observed the marked trees. We must act now.
- **Timbering is done for profit.** According to the White Township timbering plans, obtained by an Open Records Request by Friends of White's Woods, as much as 50% of the trees in White's Woods will be timbered. The original timber volume before harvest is 5,509,901 with a value of \$2,539,536.05. The after harvest volume will only be 2,754,951 with a potential revenue of \$727,552.68. This is clearly a ploy to profit from our community resource.
- **Mature forest canopy will be lost.** The Township plan calls to remove a substantial portion of the "canopy". This will dramatically damage the forest.
- **Logging plan is not approved by the DCNR.** After a similar logging attempt in 2007-2008, the Pennsylvania Department for the Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) told the supervisors that 21% was too much to remove and they needed to submit a new plan for DCNR approval prior to implementation. The supervisors have not followed this guidance.
- **Timbering plans have moved forward without adequate public input and commentary.** The COVID-19 pandemic prevented community members from attending township meetings or peacefully demonstrating. When similar proposals were put forth in 1995 and in 2007-08, 2/3 of residents did not want Whites Woods to be logged,

according to surveys administered by the township (1995) and by the Indiana Gazette (2008).

- **Proper legal procedures have not been followed.** According to documentation compiled by FWW, the township has not followed the proper legal procedures. White's Woods Nature Center is the only land in White Township that was purchased with funds donated by Project 70, funds that were set aside by the Pennsylvania State Legislature to preserve natural areas for conservation, recreation, and historical preservation. Commercial logging is not consistent with Project 70 guidelines.
- **Logging plan is not ecologically sound.** The plan is likely to introduce new problems, including storm water runoff damage to neighboring residential properties and explosive growth of invasive species. We need park management expertise in providing input to any White's Woods management plan.
- **Rototilling will propagate invasive species.** Removing the canopy to allow in extra light and rototilling invasive species (such as Japanese barberry), as the plan intends, are likely to result in an explosion of invasive species growth, rather than its reduction.
- **White's Woods is home to at least two at-risk species.** Trillium spp. and Blue Cohosh (*Caulophyllum thalictroides*) are both listed by the United Plant Savers as at-risk species (<https://unitedplantsavers.org/species-at-risk-list/>). Logging and rototilling activities will likely destroy perennial ground species, including these and many others.

Our petition asks for the following:

- **An immediate halt to the ALL work in White's Woods (marking trees, eradicating invasive species, timbering).** Halting the current plan will allow the development of a comprehensive stewardship plan.
- **A working group of WWNC stakeholders be formed** to seek necessary input from the public and from DCNR, allowing all stakeholders to be involved in the planning.
- **Use of the park exclusively for Project 70 approved purposes: recreation, conservation, historical preservation.**
- **A long-term, comprehensive, evidence-based park management plan be developed** by professionals with expertise in conservation, park management practices and Project 70 rules in concert with WWNC stakeholders.

Selected Comments (35/131 total):

I'm signing because these are the woods I explored as a child and enjoyed as an adult. I am fully aware of the Irreversible destruction that results from logging. Perfectly healthy flora and fauna are decimated in the process of removing tagged trees. This ultimately destroys the surrounding ecosystems. This must be stopped. It's unacceptable.

Proper legal process has not been followed, nor has community input been sought. This action MUST be delayed so that long term impacts can be studied and legal alternatives evaluated. Otherwise it is just wanton destruction for profit.

Deforesting this area would pose environmental risks to the ecosystem. These forests are enjoyed by this community, and railing this through during a pandemic when citizens voices have been silenced is unacceptable. Stop now!

My girls love taking walks in White's Woods with their grandfather. It is such a beautiful place in our town that should not be destroyed!

This isn't just a road paving project that can be repaved if mistakes are made - much more research and time needs to be invested in the development of management plans for White's Woods Nature Center.

White Township residents deserve more transparency from White Township Supervisors about what will happen to community land and facilities.

I advocate strongly for the development of a committee comprised of park stakeholders to determine science-based best management practices for this community park. These decisions should uphold the parks original establishment requirements of maintaining park preservation, conservation, and recreation.

White's Woods is our community's treasure---for recreation and biodiversity. The Supervisors' plan will leave it and our community unrecognizable.

We fought this irresponsible act years ago and thought the land and ecosystem was safe. Once again the greed and need to destroy has reared its ugly head again and this new assault is being done quietly. This needs to STOP once and for all.

This is the only place in the town of Indiana to take a shaded 2 hour walk with your dogs. This is a slice of heaven for our community.

I'm signing because the trails are convenient for me to get to, it is also a natural wildlife habitat, logging and timbering will drive said wildlife into Indiana Boro and cause local chaos as these animals will think they can live among humans in our back yards, not to mention deer are already getting killed in the Boro, along Philadelphia Street, this is not acceptable

I grew up in Indiana, and Whites woods has been an awesome place to hike and relax in nature.

I know I'm not the only person that comes to whites woods all the time with my dog. The township has an opportunity here to show that environmental protection and preservation is one our priorities instead of demonstrating just the opposite. Whites woods is a beautiful place that should be PRESERVED for not

only the wildlife that call it home but also for the future generations to of hikers, dog walker, or just the average person to enjoy.

I love whites woods and it's one of the things/places that makes Indiana Indiana. Having nature in our literal back yard is a massive blessing that shouldn't go away or be taken for granted

It's almost been 100 years since White's Woods was last timbered! Instead of cutting down those trees that the harborist sees only as money, why not put in a real parking lot where the basketball courts are, put in some restrooms, and beautify the gas wells with wildflowers. Turn this in to eco-tourism, because I'm pretty sure at 100 years it gets considered an old growth forest, and that would attract a lot more people to Indiana!

This is ridiculous and this park is something this entire community enjoys. This town has a beautiful wild life and nature around it, let's not destroy that!

I have been on these trails for the past 10+ years, almost half of my life, and it would be a shame to destroy the ecosystem. Many people use these woods and trails as a quick getaway. It is so close to town that anyone can use it. I don't know where else I'll scavenge for Morel mushrooms, green onion, and leeks! Not only does it provide for that, what would happen to all the animals and wildlife?

Please please please don't take away the only beautiful thing in Indiana. I go up there all the time. It's a church. They can't just steal that from us

My cousins grew up near whites woods and we loved hiking through there as kids. I would hate to see that taken away from future generations, especially when being outdoors is so healing!

I am signing this petition to save White's Woods Nature Center. The logging plan by the White Township Supervisors will devastate this community's beloved park. This stand of woods is estimated to be approximately 80 to 100 years old, one of the older forests in Western Pennsylvania. It sustains wildlife and woodland birds, such as the Hermit Thrush, Oven Bird and Scarlet Tanager. A truly beautiful spot.

White's Woods is Indiana's green space. Once it is gone, Indiana will be every so much less livable.

This is not a wise use of public resources. After a similar logging attempt in 2007-2008, the Pennsylvania Department for the Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) told the supervisors that 21% was too much to remove and they needed to submit a new plan for DCNR approval prior to implementation. The supervisors have not followed this guidance. This is clearly a ploy to profit from our community resource.

It's heartbreaking to think that our woods might be decimated by logging and rototilling. I hope White's Woods will remain a nature preserve rather than becoming a timber farm.

The selection process lacked transparency and the plan's stated goals differ from the documented marking (for removal) of mature hardwood trees rather than invasive species.

I live in Indiana County. Whites Woods Nature Center is a sanctuary. To try and change it by "mulching" and destroying trees is an absolute disgrace to the residents.

I am a former resident and still visit often when I can. A highlight of every visit is daily hiking in White's Woods with my now-11yo daughter, who grew up loving this unique and historic place like I did as a kid. When you live in a place and see it every day, maybe you get used to it and think it's not that special. Now that I live far from Indiana and miss it, I find it heartbreaking that someone wants to destroy such a biodiverse and beautiful place for the short-term gain of money for timber and development. The loss of carbon capturing trees, and of species like the 17-year cicada—which emerged in 2019 and will not again until 2036, or never—would be a tragedy.

White Township's plan to devastate White's Wood Nature Center is a cynical insult to citizen stakeholders fueled by hubris and deceptive euphemisms dressed up and paraded as "science." Of course, advice solicited from a commercial forester is going favor cutting trees for profit. Had they hired a geologist, the advice would have been to drill or mine. Had they asked a pimp, he would have submitted plans to build a brothel. Perspective is everything. There is a profound difference between a woodlot managed to maximize extracted value versus a park/nature center designated to provide recreation, wildlife habitat, and ecological diversity.

Growing up in Indiana, Whites Woods Nature Center played an important part in my childhood. As a slice of beautiful old forest directly attached to town, it allowed us an excellent opportunity to recreate and enjoy nature close to home. This is an amenity and natural habitat that should be enhanced for recreation and conservation, driving long-term value in the community, rather than depleted for short-term profit.

I lived in Indiana for 6 years. This park saved my life by keeping me connected to nature throughout my tumultuous stay there. This town has it's shares of woes - but this place is the Heart Center of life force in Indiana I will fight to protect sacred sanctuaries of nature such as this.

White's Woods is a community jewel. It sparkles and is precious in every season. The supervisors plan will leave the park unrecognizable: 50% of trees removed, trails damaged by heavy equipment, and tree tops left to form piles of debris. Stop this now!!!

As a resident and taxpayer in White Township, I implore the Twp. Supervisors to stop this logging plan in the White's Woods Nature Center. Stop it! You are violating the will of the community.

I grew up in White's Woods. It meant so much to have this beautiful forest to hike and explore. Please preserve it for generations to come.

I love these woods dearly, they are my escape from everything that's going on in the world, and they're my happy place. I know I'm not the only one, many other residents use these woods to get away. We will not be deterred by the lies and false promises set forth by those who want to destroy whites woods.

An appalling display of greed, and all the worse because they're hiding behind a bleeping pandemic to do it.

The management of White's Woods should be thoughtful, comprehensive, evidence-based, and guided by public input. I am so thankful for the hundreds of hours I have spent on the beautiful trails and want to ensure that they remain for generations to come.

Public Input Data: The Significance

Summarizing the public input collected through the three instruments described above, there is one overriding theme: LEAVE WHITE'S WOODS ALONE! This from readers of the HawkEye (33), users of White's Woods Nature Center (229), and Change.org petition signers (~600 local, ~8000 worldwide).

In 1995, the Supervisors actively requested public input through a mailed ballot, and the result was a virtual mandate to abandon timbering plans. In 2007, response to a survey by the Indiana Gazette produced similar results. Data collected this year, during a pandemic where public contact was limited, are even more compelling. Letters to the Supervisors and to DCNR (see later sections) corroborate this evidence.

Simply put, we now have had three public mandates, all opposing any mechanical removal of invasive species, timbering, use of heavy equipment, or other potential disruption to WWNC. The message is simple: LEAVE WHITE'S WOODS ALONE.