



# Friends of White's Woods, Inc.

P.O. Box 1271  
Indiana, PA 15701

February 8, 2022

Barbara Hauge, Chair  
White Township Stewardship Committee

Barb and Township Subcommittee members Dave, Matt, Sierra and Jeff:

First, on behalf of Friends of White's Woods (FWW), I want to thank the committee for its work and for taking into consideration the *FWW White's Woods Nature Center: Current Value & Future Care*.

As I mentioned to the committee in my brief presentation of this document at your organizational meeting, Friends of White's Woods has been working hard over the past 18 months to work with White's Woods user surveys and consultants, and to review DCNR documents and policy, numerous sample stewardship plans, as well as management guidelines for community forests and natural areas.

We have posted all of these documents---surveys, other parks' management plans, DCNR documents, FWW consultant reports, and guidelines for managing a natural area --- for public review, under the tab "Future Possibilities" on the Friends of White's Woods website ([friendsofwhiteswoods.org](http://friendsofwhiteswoods.org)). We trust that these documents will be helpful to the White Township Stewardship Subcommittee, as well.

So much good can be accomplished for our community forest and for the residents of White Township and the Indiana region by developing what Bureau of Recreation and Conservation Director Tom Ford termed "a long-term, holistic stewardship plan," a plan that is rooted in stakeholder input and maximizes the promise of Project 70 to permanently protect our natural area for recreation, conservation, and historical purposes.

What is key, according to DCNR's March 23, 2021 letter to the Township, is that a sound community forest management plan must *begin* with the community goals for this regional forest:

"Based on these community values, specific goals and management objectives could then be developed to identify practices and activities to maintain and/or enhance community values. For example, reducing invasive species impact would be a management objective or activity to help achieve a broader goal or value around wildlife habitat and forest health. Many options exist for assessing and incorporating public input, and it appears that local residents are ready and willing to provide constructive viewpoints and feedback." (See BOF Response, p. 4, pp. 1.)

FWW's review of other parks' management plans makes clear that, almost always, "Friends" groups are relied on to assist in the planning for and maintenance of public lands. The Project 70-funded McClelland Park Plan, for instance, relied on the Friends of McClelland Park to secure public input throughout the planning process. Most maintenance work for Pennsylvania public lands, particularly that pertaining to invasive plant control, is, also, the product of volunteer effort. In 2020, FWW secured a community grant from the Indiana County Endowment to help fund the invasive and native plant inventory in White's Woods that was conducted by the nationally-recognized Invasive Plant Laboratory at the University of Pittsburgh. Friends of White's Woods looks forward to continuing our support for White's Woods in these and other ways.

It is of note that all of the experts consulted by FWW have reported that the White's Woods Nature Center, having been governed by natural succession for the past 80 years, is really in very good condition. It is a healthy forest. And, according to the Pennsylvania DCNR Division of Forest Health, one of the best ways to keep it healthy is to take time and collect data: "Truthfully, in many cases, the best thing to do is monitor and wait. It can feel frustrating to do nothing, but there is tremendous value in understanding and tracking stressors in your forest over a number of years." (Pennsylvania Forest Health Report, PA DCNR Division of Forest Health, March 18, 2021.)

There are two additional information items that I would like to pass along. First, Alyson Fearon, Senior Director of Community Conservation and Resilience for the Allegheny Land Trust can be reached at [afearon@alleghenylantrust.org](mailto:afearon@alleghenylantrust.org). (or 412.741.2750 x204). As I think you know, Alyson has done much research regarding the possibility of a carbon sequestration contract for the White's Woods Nature Center. When I last spoke with her, Alyson reported that she understood that the Stewardship subcommittee would be hosting her planned presentation regarding her most recent research into contract options, given the committee's interest in this possible revenue stream.

Also, one of the subcommittee members mentioned at the January 20, 2022 subcommittee meeting that it he would like to see the 2020 feedback that the Township received after posting the Millstone plan on the White Township website for public review.

Ryan Shaffer indicated that, though he didn't know if he could find all of this feedback, he would provide the subcommittee with the letter submitted at that time by the Indiana Borough.

Luckily, FWW filed an Open Records Request on August 5, 2020, requesting copies of all of the feedback in question. The Township provided 108 pages of feedback, including the aforementioned letter from the Indiana Borough, a letter from the Indiana County Planning Commission, and input from about 80 citizens. I will email to you a PDF of the documents provided to FWW by the Township in this August 5, 2020 Open Records Request. I can also supply a hard copy of this feedback, as well.

It is important to add that FWW also submitted a 255-page binder of additional feedback to the Township by the July 22, 2020 deadline for public comment to the Township regarding the Millstone plan. (FWW asked that this binder be excluded from the August 5, 2020 Open Records Request. We had a copy!)

This binder includes a copy of the original Project 70 application regarding White's Woods that was received by FWW in response to an Open Records Request submitted to DCNR. (The FWW binder, again, is feedback provided to the Township in addition to the documents cited in the previous paragraph). Each of the five White Township Supervisors received a copy of this FWW binder and we trust that the subcommittee can access this portion of the feedback via one of the copies FWW previously submitted.

The White Township Stewardship Subcommittee is engaging in a long-term process and, again, we thank you for very much for your work, your receptiveness to public input, and for your commitment to preserving our natural area for future generations.

Sincerely,

Sara King, President  
Friends of White's Woods