



Friends of White's Woods Monthly Newsletter



MAY

MAY 20TH WEBINAR FOCUSES ON INVASIVE SPECIES

Nonnative, invasive plants are common in northeastern forested ecosystems. Some of these plants are associated with declines in native plant diversity or alterations to ecosystem processes like changes in soil carbon cycling, which might justify management of the species if their presence does not align with conservation goals for the property.

In this talk, Dr. Sara Kuebbing of the University of Pittsburgh and postdoctoral fellow Dr. Marion Holmes will provide information about the history of nonnative plant introduction and invasion in northeastern forests, briefly summarize the range of impacts these species may have on forested ecosystems, and provide an overview on how property managers can make management decisions about the species.

LOCAL ARTIST DONATES SIGNED/ NUMBERED PRINTS TO FRIENDS OF WHITE'S WOODS:

Indiana artist Chuck Olson signs and numbers limited edition prints for sale as an FWW fundraiser. For a \$100 or more donation, you may obtain one of the 100 prints available.



Contact FWW board member Norma Tarnoff at ntarnoff@comcast.net. Pictured are (back row, left to right); FWW treasurer Tom Miller, board member Fred Heilman, vice president Dave Dahlheimer. (Front row, left to right); board member Carolyn Trimarchi, Olson and board member Susan Dahlheimer.



Sara Kuebbing (left), an ecologist with expertise in forest ecology and invasive species has five years of professional experience working with local and regional conservation organizations on the management and conservation of protected lands, including invasive plant management. Currently an assistant professor at the University of Pittsburgh, Dr. Kuebbing runs an invasion ecology research lab. Dr. Marion Holmes (right) is an ecologist working as a postdoctoral fellow in Dr. Kuebbing's lab. With over 15 years of experience with wild plant identification, she has participated in mapping and management of non-native species on both public and private lands.



20% Framing Discount!

The Framing Hut Galleries (1502 Oakland Ave./Regency Mall) is offering a 20% discount on the framing of Chuck Olson's print when you mention you are a member of Friends of White's Woods.

UPCOMING EVENTS

May 15: "Plant Walk in White's Woods" with Cindy Rogers, president of the Evergreen Conservancy Board of Directors, at 2 p.m. Meet at the 12th Street entrance.

May 20: "Ecological Impact of Invasive Plant Species" by Dr. Sara Kuebbing, an assistant professor at the University of Pittsburgh, where she runs an invasion ecology research lab, and Dr. Marion Holmes, an ecologist working as a postdoctoral fellow in Dr. Sara Kuebbing's lab.

The FWW webinars, offered via Zoom from 4 to 5 p.m., are free and open to the public. To register for a webinar, send an email to info@friendsofwhiteswoods.org.

For more information, visit: friendsofwhiteswoods.org

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Issue 11
May 2021

Dispelling Myths

Myth 1: The White Township Board of Supervisors cannot act on the White's Woods Management Committee until the court cases filed by Friends of White's Woods are adjudicated/withdrawn/declared null and void.

The lawsuits filed by the Friends of White's Woods were not about the content of the draft Stewardship Plan. The three lawsuits are about transparency in municipal government, proper procedures in the bidding process relative to the Second Class Township Municipal Code, and halting any action planned by the township until the court cases were resolved.

Count 1: The transparency suit involved alleged violations of the Pennsylvania Sunshine Act. The Pennsylvania Office of Open Records states, "(t)he Pennsylvania Sunshine Act, 65 Pa. C.S. 701-716, requires agencies to deliberate and take official action on agency business in an open and public meeting." The Pennsylvania News Media Association states, "The purpose of the Sunshine Act is to allow the public to witness agency decisions and, . . . with limited exceptions, the discussions leading to those decisions."

Friends of White's Woods discovered that from June 2019 through March 2020, the White Township Supervisors went into executive session to approve motions to (1) create a contract for Millstone Land Management, LLC, (2) to execute a consultant agreement with Millstone Land Management, LLC for development of a management plan for White Township properties, (3) to authorize preliminary development of a cell tower on White's Woods property, and (4) to award a contract to Millstone for woodlot management/invasive species removal on a 50-acre tract within White's Woods Nature Center.

Friends of White's Woods and their legal consultant, Fair Shake Environmental Legal Services, asserted that none of these executive sessions complied with the Sunshine Law. Motions were made, votes were taken, and contracts were awarded out of public view. On May 22, Friends of White's Woods filed a legal complaint alleging violations of the Sunshine Act.

Unfortunately, the courts have provided a legal "cure" for any Pennsylvania Sunshine violation. All that is needed is for the Supervisors to ratify any invalid

decision at a subsequent public meeting. That is what occurred on July 20, during a special meeting called by the supervisors. In public, they "approved, ratified, and announced" all of the motions cited as potential Sunshine Act violations in the filed complaint. The Court dismissed this Count of the complaint.

Count 2: In the second Count to the Complaint, Friends of White's Woods argues that the township did not follow Second Class Township Code when awarding the invasive species removal contract to Millstone. The Code requires that public contracts follow a bidding process or, for smaller contracts, that three bids be received via telephone. The Code also forbids segmenting a project to lower the amount per bid in order to avoid the public bidding requirements. FWW argues that the Township impermissibly separated White's Woods into seven sections for the invasive species plant eradication. Each portion of the invasive plant species removal is identical to the other stages, except for the configuration, location, and acreage of the parcels. The Board did not advertise or request bids for the invasive species plant eradication but entered into the contract with Millstone for only the 50-acre parcel at a price of \$20,000. FWW alleges that the township divided the acreage to keep the work on each section under \$21,000 so as not to have to advertise for bids as required by the Municipal Planning Code.

Count 3: Because the White Township Board and its contractor Millstone have threatened to commence all or part of the operations within the White's Woods Nature Park, FWW requested an injunction to prevent any such action from being taken. FWW believes that the operations threatened by the Board will do irreparable harm to the White's Woods Nature Park and thus asked the Court to enjoin the Township from authorizing any work in the Park. It should be noted that since April 2020, no action has been taken in the woods.

LETTER MARKS ONE-YEAR ANNIVERSARY

April 8 marks the one-year anniversary of the Friends of White's Woods (FWW) discovery of trees marked for timbering in the White's Woods Nature Center (WWNC) — markings that, we soon realized, were the outcome of a White Township timbering project in motion since 2018, almost entirely out of public view.

The outcry that ensued caught the attention of DCNR administration, who, though legally responsible for overseeing Project 70 lands such as the WWNC, had not previously been asked to review township plans to timber. So DCNR stepped in to allow public input and to initiate their review.

In this past year, FWW has worked with consultants to educate ourselves and others regarding the value of our community forest: The WWNC helps avoid hundreds of thousands of gallons of stormwater runoff annually, absorbs over 1,000 tons of carbon dioxide and other pollutants, and helps reduce area temperatures. Our precious natural area provides extraordinary opportunities for outdoor recreation, including hiking, biking, walking, skiing, bird-watching, nature photography — opportunities that are especially important for retaining and recruiting businesses, families and individuals to our region.

And, of special importance, FWW learned that mature forests such as the WWNC are eligible for annual carbon sequestration payments to keep the forest standing.

FWW has learned about proper management techniques for our natural area.

Multiple consulting forest experts have confirmed that the WWNC is especially healthy.

Multiple FWW webinars have pointed to ecologically sound management for invasive plants and have identified various forest management goals, including the preservation of songbird habitat.

FWW has sought (and received) grants, produced a monthly newsletter, scheduled WWNC bird and plant walks, co-sponsored a WWNC artists' event, provided radio interviews, worked with numerous state-wide conservation and forestry groups, conducted a WWNC-use survey, hosted a petition, and developed a comprehensive website (friendsofwhiteswoods.org).

Expert and citizen input is essential to preserve the WWNC for the benefit of all. Friends of White's Woods has worked for a year to place this essential information in public view and has experienced overwhelming public support. But White Township seems to disregard it all. It is so important to save White's Woods.

*Sara King
Indiana
President, FWW*

**For more information, visit: friendsofwhiteswoods.org
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