



Friends of White's Woods Monthly Newsletter



FWW Honors Lafontaine with Volunteer Award

“Anyone who has ever set foot or ridden a bicycle on the Hoodlebug Trail or on the Ghost Town Trail,” said Indiana County Parks Director Ed Patterson, “owes a sincere debt of gratitude to Laurie Lafontaine” for her efforts to make these Indiana County trails a reality.

For her decades-long work in establishing these trails, among other volunteer services, Friends of White's Woods (FWW) held a June 21st luncheon to present Lafontaine with the President's Volunteer Service Lifetime Achievement Award.

Individuals who serve on the Indiana County Commission, Indiana Planning Commission and Indiana Borough Council, along with individuals from organizations in Pittsburgh, Cambria County, Westmoreland County, the League of Women Voters, the Evergreen Conservancy, and other friends and supporters joined FWW to celebrate Lafontaine and express appreciation for her work.

The President's Volunteer Service Award “provides an opportunity to honor outstanding volunteers and recognize the impact they make.” This award was founded in 2003 to “recognize the im-



FWW has given the President's Volunteer Service Award three times. Pictured are: (l) Tom Miller (2022), (c) Laurie Lafontaine (2024) and (r) Cindy Rogers (2023).

Photo by Cheri Widzowski

portant role of volunteers in America's strength and national identity - to honor the volunteers who are using their time and talents to solve some of the toughest challenges facing our nation. It honors individuals whose service positively impacts communities and, also, inspires those around them to take action.”

FWW President Sara King noted we have learned that volunteers are essential to the creation of good and decent places to live. Lafontaine's advocacy for trails, King said, was for many years nearly a full-time job, always without remuneration. King quoted written remarks by Patterson in advance of the award: “When I think of Laurie I am reminded of a quote by the late Robert F. Kennedy: ‘Some people see things as they are and ask why, I see things that never were and ask why not?’”

County Commissioner Sherene Hess

also thanked Lafontaine for her extraordinary work. In her remarks, Hess noted that, in general, the volunteer service provided by individuals to our community is both remarkable and invaluable. “We owe all volunteers, said Hess, our deepest thanks.”

Lafontaine currently serves on the Indiana County Planning Commission and has been a member of Indiana County Park Advisory Board since 1990 to help oversee the development and expansion of the Indiana County park system. She served for a few years on the national Rails to Trails Conservancy Board as a volunteer which meant making trips to Washington, D.C., at her own expense. She was the chairperson of the America's Industrial Heritage Project trails committee that helped to foster the development of many other trails in the nine-county region.

UPCOMING EVENTS

July 24: 7 p.m., White Township Board of Supervisors meeting, Municipal Building. Stewardship Plan will be on the agenda. Please plan to attend.

July 13 and 27: Barberry Removal, 9:30 a.m., 12th Street entrance

Aug. 8: Big Tree Walk, 5:30 p.m.

August TBA: Plant Walk

October: Annual Membership Meeting

Please check [friendsofwhiteswoods.org/events](https://www.friendsofwhiteswoods.org/events) and/or your email for up-to-date information on July/August events.

Membership Renewal

It's time to renew your FWW membership.

Please use the form here: https://www.friendsofwhiteswoods.org/files/ugd/6b9559_545ebbf8e8a34ce28ac6b7eb-f6c20045.pdf to do so.

Indicate on the form ways you are able to assist the efforts to help White's Woods.

For more information, visit: [friendsofwhiteswoods.org](https://www.friendsofwhiteswoods.org)

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Beech Leaf Disease Found in White's Woods

Beech Leaf Disease (BLD) was first reported in Ohio in 2012. Since then, the disease has spread east, south, and north, and, according to data provided by Cleveland Metroparks, arrived in Indiana County in 2022. The disease now generally threatens northeastern U.S. forests: It has spread throughout Pennsylvania and New York and, in the last two years, has made its way to 13 states, including Vermont, New Hampshire and Maine.

Symptoms of BLD include dark bands between the veins of leaves. Leaves are cupped, deformed, shriveled and, sometimes, smaller than usual. Leaves have a leathery texture, with a premature leaf drop and aborted buds leading to sparse leaf cover. (It should be noted that there are various organisms that can change the appearance of beech leaves.)

While much research is being conducted in various states by public and private forest experts, there is much that is not known about BLD. What is known is that BLD can kill beech trees, that the symptoms are associated with the presence of a non-native foliar parasitic nematode (a tiny worm), that the symptoms are first apparent in the small understory beech saplings - though larger trees may be affected, and that the disease may weaken trees over time, making them more vulnerable to other pests.

According to the Maine Department of Agriculture, what we don't know about BLD includes:

- How the disease spreads;
- Details of how the disease develops and impacts forest ecosystems and how that development is different in stands already ravaged by beech bark disease;
- Whether other organisms (bacteria or fungi for instance) are needed for disease development or if the nematode can cause disease without other agents;
- If there are other plants that could be impacted by the nematode or organisms associated with them;
- If there are effective ways to manage the disease:

BLD was identified in 3,500-acre Kirtland, Ohio, Holden Arboretum in 2014 and quickly spread through its natural areas where beech is the dominant tree

species. As a consequence, the work of Holden BLD researchers has been critical to the developing understanding of this disease. "It's become clear," according to the Holden website, "that some beech trees, even in highly affected areas, develop little or no symptoms," and, apparently, have some level of genetic resistance to BLD. The Holden researchers have also observed that some years, possibly due to climate conditions, the beech trees show less damage from BLD.

The U.S. Forest Service is collaborating with nearly a dozen agencies and organizations on this issue. They include Holden Arboretum, Cleveland Metro Parks, Pennsylvania State University, USDA Agricultural Research Service, West Virginia University, Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station, the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry and several other state agencies. They are researching different means to mitigate the problem.

According to a June 2024 article in the University of New Hampshire magazine, New Hampshire Agricultural Experiment Station scientist Jeff Garnas, who is an associate professor of forest ecosystem health in the natural resources and the environment department at UNH, is "initiating a comprehensive study of patterns of both BLD- and BBD (Beech bark disease)-induced mortality trees in eastern forests, thanks in part to a recent grant from the U.S. Forest Service's Forest Health Monitoring program." This research aims to understand tree growth in response to these diseases and "may allow us to identify stands at the greatest risk of decline and mortality."

All experts, including the USDA forest service and Pennsylvania's DCNR emphasize that to avoid spreading the disease it is important to avoid moving beech tree material including branches, twigs, leaves and seedlings and nursery stock from affected areas.

Beech leaf disease was spotted in beech saplings in White's Woods last fall. Our forest has survived gypsy moths, Emerald Ash borers, beech bark disease, and more, with very little damage. We've sidestepped the Yellow Poplar weevil and oak wilt. The



Beech Leaf disease is depicted on the above leaf. Discoloration and shriveling are evident.

entire state of Pennsylvania is fighting the Hemlock Woolly Adelgid. Climate change and invasive species are presenting a challenge, but so far, we are hanging in.

Mammals Seen in White's Woods: 2020 to 2024

Black Bear
Chipmunk
Cottontail Rabbit
Coyote
Fisher
Gray Fox
Gray Squirrel
Groundhog
Mole
Porcupine
Red Fox
Red Squirrel
Striped Skunk
White-tailed Deer

*We've seen evidence of raccoons - but no direct sightings.

*We've also seen turkeys, frogs, at-risk Eastern Box Turtles, an at-risk Seal Salamander, Red-shouldered Hawks, Red-tailed Hawks, Great Horned Owls, dozens of resident and migratory bird species, mushrooms, glorious spider webs, wild flowers, vulnerable plant species, edible and medicinal plants, and incredible trees!

For more information, visit: friendsofwhiteswoods.org

We welcome feedback. Email us at: info@friendsofwhiteswoods.org

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