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FEATURED

DCNR talks on role in forestry plan

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Tom Peel / Indiana Gazette

A spokesman for the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources said his agency is “actively working” with White Township on its plans for the White’s Woods Nature Center.

“DCNR has been actively working with the township so they can appropriately address threats to the health of the forest including but not limited to invasive plants, deer impacts and lack of adequate regeneration to ensure long-term sustainability,” department Press Secretary Terry Brady said late Tuesday.

DCNR approval is required before the township and its contractor Millstone Land Management LLC can move ahead with plans for an overhaul of portions of the wooded recreation area straddling the township's border with Indiana Borough's northern neighborhoods.

"DCNR has received draft information regarding their planned work at White's Woods and other township properties," the spokesman continued. "Coordination is occurring with our Bureau of Forestry and Bureau of Recreation and Conservation to advance the development of a draft plan that would reflect what DCNR typically sees in other forest stewardship plans."

Those plans have drawn fire from the citizen group Friends of White's Woods Inc., which filed suit in Indiana County Court of Common Pleas last week, seeking to block "all invasive species removal and timbering operations" in the park. It claims that the court's failure to do so "could result in irreparable damage" to White's Woods.

The lawsuit also asks the court to award FWW "its attorney's fees and costs of litigation" and "such other relief as may be just and proper."

Brady also stressed that "the property must be managed consistent" with Project 70, also known as the 1964 Project 70 Land Acquisition and Borrowing Act, under whose terms the township purchased the 250 acres now known as White's Woods.

"The Project 70 act requires a property to be stewarded for recreation, conservation and historical purposes," Brady said. "It does not expressly prohibit forest management for purposes of maintaining a healthy forest ecosystem consistent with the recreation and conservation objectives of the act."

FWW officials also said they do not oppose logging, per se.

"A proper stewardship plan may recommend that some timbering be appropriate," retired attorney and FWW board member Robert Lambert said in a recent interview. He insisted, however, on "a stewardship plan, prepared by individuals with the necessary background in ecology, conservation, forestry and park management," that could be developed in conjunction with both the board of supervisors and FWW.

Township officials and Millstone's Mike Lawer have said that their plans will maintain a healthy forest ecosystem.

“What we are doing is not traditional logging,” Lawer said April 9. “Our intentions are not for economic benefit, but to establish forest health, aesthetics and safety.”

Township Manager Milt Lady said April 9 that what Millstone planned was a different approach from what was proposed, but never carried out, in a forestry management plan 10 years ago, also opposed by FWW.

The matter has been a topic on agendas of the Board of Supervisors for the past year. The board’s next meeting is scheduled for tonight at 7:30 p.m.

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