

# Opponents ask for delay of White's Woods forestry proposal

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In an open letter to White Township officials, with copies addressed to a long list that includes Indiana County, state, conservation and media officials, two writers are urging a halt to planned work on the township's 250-acre White's Woods Nature Center.

"We are writing to request that you cease all work ... until there is ample opportunity for effective citizen input regarding the goals, objectives, and sustainable management strategies for the proper management of this park," Sara B. King and Andrew C. Davis wrote on behalf of the group Friends of White's Woods.

That's a property nestled between College Lodge, Chevy Chase Heights and the north end of Indiana Borough.

On April 9, township officials said Millstone Land Management is focused "on a 50-acre upland dry site" to be tackled this spring and summer. Millstone is the township's consultant for dealing with invasive plant species on White Township properties, including the recreation complex and White's Woods.

"What we are doing is not traditional logging," said Mike Lawer of Millstone. "Our intentions are not for economic benefit, but to establish forest health, aesthetics and safety."

King, an emeritus professor at Saint Francis University, identified herself as president of the group, while Davis was identified as vice president. The letter was dated Monday, two days before tonight's scheduled 7:30 p.m. meeting of the board of supervisors, at which a portion of the White's Woods plan is listed on the agenda.

"As you are aware, Friends of White's Woods, along with its many supporters, has long expressed our desire to work with you to find a mutually favorable resolution regarding the future of the White's Woods Nature Center," King and Davis wrote. "In just the past week, based on FWW's outreach efforts, it appears that citizen interest in this issue is as strong as ever — if not stronger."

They recalled a 2008 drive in which "over 1,000 people signed a petition and 200 to 400 citizens attended public meetings to alert the township supervisors of our collective interest in developing park management goals and strategies."

White Township Manager Milt Lady said he had received the letter and would respond to it at tonight's meeting.

King and Davis are among several individuals to express concern in recent communications with The Indiana Gazette. Another is retired attorney Robert W. Lambert, who said he is among members of FWW.

"The members of FWW have been prohibited from traveling to the township offices to examine the public records relating to the tree removal and timbering operations as a result of the governor's coronavirus stay-at-home order," Lambert wrote in an April 15 statement.

While Lawer is project consultant, he said on April 9 that his company is the winner among three companies asked to bid on the work.

"I will be overseeing bids for the tree cutting ... but not doing the actual work," Lawer said. "We do bid the jobs out. We got three quotes from people who do similar work."

Lady compared Lawer's plan to what Millstone oversaw at the township recreation complex, and said there will be a different approach from what was proposed, but never carried out, in a forestry management plan 10 years ago.

King and Davis see things differently.

"It is of note that the White Township Sustainable Forest Plan identifies the primary objective in White's Woods as a 'Sustainable Objective Timber Harvest,' they wrote. "The information that we have received indicates that the percentage of timbering planned for the White's Woods Nature Center is significantly greater than would be consistent with appropriate management of the park for conservation and recreational purposes."

Tonight, the township board of supervisors is scheduled to award a contract for "White's Woods Tract 1 — Treatment of Invasive Plant Species."

Lady said that involves the use of machines to "rip up invasive plants." He said there would be a second phase involving mechanical means of removing those plants as well as use of "an environmentally friendly herbicide."

The township's website includes the agenda as well as ways to join "GoToMeeting Public Participation" in a meeting that centers on an otherwise-closed township administration building along Indian Springs Road. On

March 17, White Township supervisors approved a 30-day state of emergency prompted by the COVID-19 outbreak. It was done in a conference call, then ratified at a voting meeting March 26.

Lady said it is likely the state of emergency will be continued for as long as Gov. Tom Wolf's stay-at-home order continues. He said it was likely the supervisors will vote on such a continuance tonight.