



White Township's whatchamacallit

Posted on [January 29, 2021](#) by [David Loomis](#)



Gail L. McCauley, supervisor, White Township. Pa. Photo: township website

Opinion

By David Loomis

INDIANA – Thank goodness White Township Supervisor Gail L. McCauley clarified that whole [debate over White's Woods](#), the 250-acre recreational forest that straddles the boundary between the township and neighboring Indiana borough.

During supervisors' Wednesday night meeting, Todd L. Sherbondy, a certified arborist and sales arborist with 140-year-old Davey Tree Expert Co., spoke on behalf of [Friends of White's Woods](#). A few minutes into his brief public comments about the economic benefits of natural forests, Mr. Sherbondy, a two-decade resident of Indiana, Pa., made a passing reference to the township's "[logging plan](#)" for the woods. Ms. McCauley interjected.

"We do not have a logging plan," she said. "There is not and never has been a logging plan."

THE TREE EXPERT politely dodged and proceeded with his brief presentation. It included mention of "a main inherent benefit" of the woods — the market value of its

capacity to [store carbon dioxide](#), the greenhouse gas [most associated](#) with the worst effects of climate change.

Mr. Sherbondy hinted that the value of a living, growing forest that removes carbon dioxide from the air may exceed the value of trees sold to a sawmill after, you know, whatchamacallit.

For example, the township's designated contractor to whatchamacallit the forest estimated the "[timber valuation](#)" of the "merchantable" trees in the 245-acre White's Woods at \$727,552.68, according to township [plan](#). (One IUP biologist [estimated](#) the township's whatchamacallit plan would remove "something like 56 percent of the tree volume in the entire park.")



Friends of White's Woods yard sign, Indiana, Pa. June 28, 2020. Photo: David Loomis

Mr. Sherbondy, on the other hand, said the existing living forest has a "stored value" of \$643,945 worth of carbon dioxide, and the value grows with the trees in the forest.

It may be like comparing apples and oranges to equate the value of the timber at the sawmill to the value of the carbon banked in White's Woods, Mr. Sherbondy acknowledged in a Jan. 29 phone interview. But that may be due in part to the infancy of the carbon market, which is bullish.

At the crest of last year's first wave of the pandemic, The Wall Street Journal began reporting that trading in such practices – environmental, social and governance practices, or ESGs – was brisk, driven in part by growing awareness in corporate America of the worsening climate-change crisis. By last summer, ESG trading had become "[big business](#)," attracting global oil corporation BP. Chevrolet, Walt Disney Co., Capital One and others have been in the market for [awhile](#).

(A variant of this market-based pollution trading is the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative that Gov. Tom Wolf [proposes](#) to join. State Sen. Joe Pittman and state Rep. Jim Struzzi, Republicans representing Indiana County in Harrisburg, [oppose](#) the effort, although Mr. Pittman has [expressed](#) interest in carbon sequestration.)

To make up for their carbon emissions, companies are exchanging a “climate-change currency” earned through efforts to reduce or sequester greenhouse gasses. How? By “paying timberland owners to leave trees standing,” for example, The Journal [reported](#). For White Township supervisors, that means they may market White’s Woods to carbon credit buyers instead of to sawmills.



RURAL APPALACHIA has a mixed legacy as a serial harvester of carbon from timber, coal, oil and natural gas. Its future now may include profitably storing that carbon in its forests.

Can Ms. McCauley and her White Township-supervisor colleagues see their forest for the trees? Their fiduciary responsibility to taxpaying constituents should demonstrate a willingness to invest in the long-term carbon-sequestering value of White’s Woods – instead of, you know, whatchamacallit.

David Loomis, Ph.D., emeritus professor of journalism at Indiana University of Pennsylvania, is editor of The HawkEye.

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1 Response to *White Township’s whatchamacallit*



1. **Norma Tarnoff** says:

January 30, 2021 at 8:15 am

Thank you for this article. McCauly rudely interrupted Mr. Sherbondy mid sentence to claim their plan is for the betterment of the woods. She has obviously not ever visited these woods. If she had I would dare her to find one diseased tree among those 650 trees marked for removal. In fact those that are marked are the biggest, most profitable trees for logging. And this is only the first of 7 areas to be logged.

Friends of White's Woods have hired or consulted with 4 scientists, an arborist, a forester of 30 years, and specialists in storm water mitigation, bird habitat, carbon sequestration, etc. All agree that the Supervisors plan which they cling to like the holy grail will be catastrophic to the woods and this community.

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