



# Friends of White's Woods Monthly Newsletter



## Indiana Area Ecologist to speak on Rural Areas and Climate Change at February's Webinar

A direct descendant of Judge Thomas White, the namesake of both White's Woods and White Township, will talk about engaging rural area citizens in the discussion about climate change in a free FWW webinar Feb. 11.

Dr. Bonnie McGill, an ecosystem ecologist and science communicator at Carnegie Museum of Natural History, is White's great-great-great-great granddaughter by way of his descendants Richard White, Juliet White Watson, Ann Watson Agnew, Judith Agnew Moorhead Holsinger and Patty Moorhead.

"Even though climate change is happening in Western Pennsylvania, the subject of climate change remains difficult to talk about here and in much of rural America," McGill said. "In this talk, I will introduce the Climate and Rural Systems Partnership (CRSP) between Carnegie Museum of Natural History, the University of Pittsburgh, Mercer County Conservation District, and Powdermill Nature Reserve (Westmoreland County)," she added, noting that Indiana County is also part of this partnership.

The goal, according to McGill, is to build awareness about climate change in our area, how it impacts the people and places we care about, and how community-level solutions may work.

A 2002 Marion Center Area High School graduate, McGill credits her interest in the environment to high school classes taught by Tom Betts. She earned a degree in biology from Washington and Jefferson College, went on to work as an ecology lab manager at Duke University before earning her Ph.D. in ecosystem ecology from Michigan State University. Prior to her current work at the Carnegie Museum of Natural History, she studied the net greenhouse gas footprint of commercial row crops with and without irrigation in the Midwest, the role of climate change in a nitrate-polluted aquifer in Botswana, and how conservation practices on farms in Iowa affect nitrate pollution in Iowa rivers. Her work in Iowa was funded through a prestigious David H. Smith Conservation Research Fellowship. "Comfortable Spaces for Uncomfortable Conversations: The Climate and Rural Systems Partnership of Western Pennsylvania" will run from 4 to 5 p.m. with a question-and-answer opportunity at the webinar's conclusion. To register for the webinar, send an email to [info@friendsofwhiteswoods.org](mailto:info@friendsofwhiteswoods.org).



*Dr. Bonnie McGill*

*Carnegie Museum of Natural History  
Ecosystem Ecologist/Science Communicator*

## *Saving the Birds*

More than 100 species of birds utilize White's Woods, either as their home or as a stop on their migratory routes, according to Dr. Margaret Brittingham's January webinar for FWW.

However, more than 170 million eastern forest birds have been lost since 1970, including the loss of six in 10 wood thrushes. According to Brittingham, habitat loss and fragmentation are the primary causes of the decline.

Maintaining our forests is one way to halt and reverse the decline since community forests are important places for migratory birds to stop and re-fuel. Downed, older and cavity-laden trees provide habitats for birds and other woodland creatures.

Brittingham also talked about the removal of invasive species at Hartley Acres, a 43-acre part of Penn State's Arboretum. The work at Hartley Acres included deer exclosures to foster the growth of desirable tree species since deer can cause problems with regenerating trees.

### **UPCOMING WEBINARS**

**Feb. 11:** "Comfortable Spaces for Uncomfortable Conversations: The Climate and Rural Systems Partnership of Western Pennsylvania" by Indiana native Dr. Bonnie McGill, an ecosystem ecologist and science communicator with Carnegie Museum of Natural History

**March 4:** "Friends of White's Woods: i-Tree benefit calculation" by Todd Sherbondy, an arborist with The Davey Tree Expert Co. of Monroeville. The 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](mailto:info@friendsofwhiteswoods.org).

**For more information, visit: [friendsofwhiteswoods.org](http://friendsofwhiteswoods.org)**

**Like us on FaceBook: Friends of White's Woods, Inc.**

**Follow us on Instagram: [friendsofwhiteswoodsinc](https://www.instagram.com/friendsofwhiteswoodsinc)**

**Issue 8  
February 2021**

## ***FWW Board Members Discuss WWNC's Future with Sen. Joseph Pittman***

On Jan. 7, Friends of White's Woods board members Sara King, David Dahlheimer, Fred Heilman, and Norma Tarnoff met with State Sen. Joseph Pittman via Zoom to explain numerous historical, present and future issues of the woods. A very extensive survey and petition showed that residents of our community and users of the woods want them left alone. Recreational activities in the woods abound for all ages year round. From 8,000 petition respondents and 229 survey respondents, the main recommendations were additional signage and parking.

FWW's forestry consultant Mike Wolf's evaluation was reviewed, emphasizing the excellent health of White's Woods. His recommendations confirmed the need for a long-range, science-based stewardship plan to preserve this community treasure. Friends of White's Woods has been working hard since 1995 to achieve this essential goal.

We reviewed the history of the woods and its acquisition through Project 70 funds. Fred explained the stormwater runoff that plagues the borough and emphasized the important role trees play in reducing stormwater runoff, pointing out that any timbering in White's Woods would dramatically increase stormwater runoff.

Sara discussed a newly created tool, I-tree analysis, which evaluates the monetary value of the trees, how much water trees absorb, and how trees filter the air we breathe by absorbing carbon, nitrogen, and other harmful particulates. Their shade also lowers the temperature of the surrounding area. She also introduced a carbon capture program, where businesses and industries pay the owner to leave the woods alone, thereby receiving the woods' carbon-capture points.

Finally, David reviewed the recreational value shared by all users as well as the needed steps for preserving the future of these woods, emphasizing the need for a science-based stewardship plan.

Sen. Pittman thanked us for our work and was very impressed and pleased with all our accomplishments. He offered his help and support in much of our research. He will try to investigate possible grant opportunities as well as encourage conversation between the White Township Supervisors, FWW and the community.



*Japanese Stiltgrass, an exotic invasive shrub, is identifiable by its pale green, lance-shaped leaves that have a silvery stripe of reflective hairs along the midrib of the upper leaf surface. The leaves are alternate and range in length from 1 to 3 inches. Stiltgrass resembles bamboo, but its stems are thin and wiry, and can be green, purple, or brown.*

## **Japanese Stiltgrass (*Microstegium vimineum*): A Toxic Poison**

Japanese stiltgrass is an annual grass that is native to China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, and the Caucasus Mountains. Around 1919, it was found to have been introduced to North America, in Tennessee, most likely through its use as a packing material for porcelain.

Also called Nepalese browntop, Japanese stiltgrass is an aggressive invader of forest lands throughout the eastern United States. Infestations can impact the diversity of native species, reduce wildlife habitat, and disrupt important ecosystem functions. Considered one of the most damaging invasive plant species in the United States, stiltgrass spreads through a high production of seeds and also by sprouting new shoots from the stems that come in contact with the ground. Infestations spread rapidly and the seed can remain viable in the soil for up to five years.

Japanese stiltgrass alters the structure of natural plant communities and reduces biodiversity by displacing indigenous herbaceous vegetation through its dense growth, which rapidly forms monocultures that are sometimes acres in extent. It kills almost everything underneath it, from valuable plants, flowers and herbs to seedlings for future forests and actually gives off a toxic poison.

In addition, the plant is not eaten by deer and has been detrimental to ground-nesting birds that utilize the forest floor.

### **Identification:**

- Japanese stiltgrass is a prostrate to erect, sprawling and freely branched summer annual with spreading stems that root at the nodes.
- The stems are stiff and climb over other vegetation reaching more than 3 feet in height but will remain prostrate if mowed.
- Leaf blades are broader than many other grasses, particularly under shady conditions

### **How to Remove Japanese Stiltgrass:**

1. Hand pulling for small patches in late summer or early fall. Wear gloves.
2. Mowing or weed whacking in August through early September.
3. Spraying large areas with a certified organic herbicide is also an option. The problem with most herbicides, whether organic or synthetic, is that they kill not only the targeted plant but everything in the treated area, including plants you want to keep. The best time to spray is when the targeted plant is most vulnerable: late summer when the grass has expended a great deal of energy on growth and is just beginning to flower. The plant will not have enough reserve energy to make a comeback for the season.
4. Goats will also eat Japanese stiltgrass. However, you will need to protect desirable plants from the goats.

**For more information, visit: [friendsofwhiteswoods.org](http://friendsofwhiteswoods.org)**

**Like us on FaceBook: Friends of White's Woods, Inc.**

**Follow us on Instagram: [friendsofwhiteswoodsinc](https://www.instagram.com/friendsofwhiteswoodsinc)**

**Issue 8  
February 2021**