

# Recreation subcommittee to be formed on woodlot management

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Stock photos of signs. White Township Municipal Building

Tom Peel / Indiana Gazette

White Township supervisors voted Wednesday to have the township's recently created recreation advisory board form a subcommittee for woodlot management, including at White's Woods Nature Center.

Those interested in applying to be on the committee can fill out an application for vacant board or commission, available on the township's website, [www.whitetownship.org](http://www.whitetownship.org), under documents and forms.

Township Manager Milt Lady said he was unsure how many people would serve and speculated it could be possibly three, five or seven.

Ryan Shaffer, recreation director, said the recreation advisory committee is now ready for such a task.

That committee was formed earlier this year per requirements in the state's Second Class Township code.

Shaffer and Lady said the rules would allow non-township residents to be considered on the committee.

The township can now move forward with woodlot management after the resolution of a lawsuit, which was filed by the citizen group Friends of White's Woods.

Judge William Martin of the Court of Common Pleas of Indiana County on Aug. 5. denied injunctive relief sought against the township in a lawsuit filed by the nonprofit group, which in part wanted "to enjoin the Defendant from performing surface operations in order to prevent permanent and irreparable harm in White's Woods," according to Martin's opinion.

Supervisor Gail McCauley noted Wednesday the lawsuit cost the township nearly \$50,000, though most of that was covered under its liability insurance carrier.

However, she said, she believes the insurance company will find a way to recoup the loss in the next few years, such as through a premium increase.

She described the lawsuit as "frivolous" and said the judge's ruling showed the board had done nothing wrong.

During public comment, Tom Miller and Dave Dahlheimer, of Friends of White's Woods, called for public input on the management of White's Woods.

"On seven different occasions ... FWW reached out to work with the township on formulating a plan to have a stewardship plan ... starting with public input on their use of and goals for the woods and an expert assessment from many disciplines of what is currently in White's Woods. ... These overtures were rebuffed seven times. Had we begun to work together, the need for the lawsuit would have been negated.

"Friends of White's Woods was not alone in calling for public input: In the Bureau of Forestry response to the stewardship plan, they said 'The Bureau of Forestry recommends the township implement a public input process to help inform both development and implementation of a forest stewardship plan,'" Miller said.

Dahlheimer reiterated Miller's statement.

Norma Tarnoff, participating via telephone, reminded the public and supervisors that Friends of White's Woods invited several specialists, including an arborist, to look at the woods, including from aerial photographs, and that they reported the forest is healthy.

She suggested the township could earn about \$25,000 annually by doing nothing with the forest in White's Woods though a carbon sequestration program.

Township resident Joel Royer, who said he is not affiliated with Friends of White's Woods, suggested the township give the White's Woods Nature Center to Indiana County to be managed as a county park.

He noted the county manages similar properties, including Blue Spruce Park near Ernest.

Lady replied that option was considered years ago, but due to the property being purchased with Project 79 funds, township officials were advised at that time that selling the land to the county would trigger the requirement that the township repay, with interest, the money used to purchase the property.

At that time, years ago, Lady said that cost was estimated at \$1 million.