

## Friends of Hays Woods Task Force Presentation -- 20180912 -- Kate St. John

1. Cover: Introducing Friends of Hays Woods, some history of the site and what inspires us to love the place.
2. Photo credits.
3. **The original friends of Hays Woods were people who didn't necessarily know each other.** They went there to walk, explore, ...
4. bird watch and bike. They loved the place as their own urban wilderness ...
5. but for everyone else Hays Woods was just That Hill Across The River.
6. Its beauty was hidden in plain sight.
7. Then in 2003, Pittsburgh Development Group purchased Hays Woods from LTV Bankruptcy court for 2.7 million dollars. Owner Charles Betters, conceived of an enormous development, the **Pittsburgh Palisades Park, including a racetrack, casino, hotel, retail and residential areas.**
8. To prepare the site for development, the forest would have to be logged
9. and its coal would have to be removed using mountaintop removal mining methods. This would lower the hilltops, fill the valleys and obliterate many of the streams.
10. When those who loved Hays Woods learned the forest was going to be destroyed they got together and enlisted the help of others.
11. They formed the **“Save Hays Woods Coalition.”** Members included neighbors and concerned citizens as well as Baldwin Citizen’s Alliance, Group against Smog and Pollution, Penn Future, the STUDIO for Creative Inquiry at CMU, and the Allegheny Group of the Sierra Club.
12. We didn’t think a strip mine and racetrack were the best use of this urban wilderness. Each organization worked to inform the public about the threat posed by the development and raise awareness of the value of this enormous urban forest.
13. The Coalition made presentations to city, state and federal representatives,
14. convened public meetings
15. and presented exhibitions.
16. Hays Woods’ attributes were also used as an educational topic at Carnegie Mellon University, Chatham University, The University of Pittsburgh, Allegheny College, and CAPA High School.
17. Hundreds of citizens joined the effort to Save Hays Woods, making calls and sending comments including this Are You Nuts campaign sent to Katie McGinty, Secretary of PA DEP, as the agency was evaluating the strip mining application.
18. Meanwhile the City needed to know more about its hillsides so they commissioned several studies to analyze Pittsburgh’s hilly topography, including Hays Woods, and make policy and zoning recommendations. (This one is the ecological study led by Allegheny Land Trust in 2004.) As a result, the City amended the **Hillsides Special Zoning District** development rules and passed an ordinance banning timbering on steep slopes.
19. Then in **Sept 2006**, a site in Killbuck Twp using a blast and fill strategy quite similar to the Palisades proposal, collapsed in a massive landslide that engulfed Route 65 and the railroad tracks. It ran all the way down to the river. This is the **Walmart Landslide on Rt 65**
20. **A few months later the PA Department of Environmental Protection denied the Developer’s mining permit.**

Charles Betters appealed it all the way to the PA Supreme Court where it was finally was laid to rest. Denied. This took many years.

21. 10 years after the Betters project began threatening Hays Woods, a pair of **Bald Eagles started nesting in 2013.**

22. People love bald eagles and feel protective toward the places they nest.

23. The eagle watchers became Hays Woods newest friends.

24. So in 2016 everyone was thrilled when **the URA bought Hays Woods** to convey it to the City of Pittsburgh as the city's largest urban park. We're also thrilled that the URA plans to protect the site from mining and fracking through a conservation easement. But we were dismayed to learn that 89 acres were reserved for potential residential construction.

Because of our dismay, the Friends of Hays Woods got together again, not as organizations but as individuals, to continue our role as advocates for the forest.

25. **What are the unique attributes of Hays Woods that inspire people to love the place and act in its defense?** .... Its history of ownership, natural features and sheer size make it a special urban greenspace.

26. Hays Woods hasn't had many owners. Back in the 1800s Samuel Hays owned a farm on the plateau. When his daughter married, the Glass Farm shared the highland as well.

27. Like all of Pittsburgh the site was rich in coal which the Hays & Haberman Coal company mined through drift and deep shaft mines.

28. The Hays plateau remained sparsely populated. ... In the 1930s the Jones and Laughlin Steel Corporation (J&L) purchased the site and consolidated ownership of the coal and gas mines.

29. Remnants of mining activity are found today: abandoned mine entrances, subsidence and some abandoned mine drainage

30. J&L (bought by LTV) built a research laboratory on the edge of the site. When LTV closed and sold the lab, the site became a private academy on W.Agnew Rd.

31. Today power lines and gas lines cross the site

32. And yet, through single ownership and lack of use, it's still a huge forest that feels like an urban wilderness.

33. It has 6 interior forest patches

34. old growth trees.

35. wetlands and waterfalls

36. meadows,

37. and steep wooded slopes

38. **People love Hays Woods for all those reasons and for ...**

39. ... its accessible, natural overlooks without the bustle of cars and crowds. Hays Woods has no paved roads.

40. its more than 7 miles of trails, easy to walk thanks in part to the utility lines

41. its wildlife (fox squirrel & salamander)

42. and birds (Bald Eagle)

43. (Scarlet Tanager & Indigo Bunting, nest at HW) As the region loses habitat to suburban development, Hays Woods remains a haven for birds and wildlife.

44. Hays Woods is so big and remote that there are places where you cannot hear the sound of traffic. In my experience, that's not true of any other park in Pittsburgh.

45. **Non-obvious, yet tangible benefits that most Pittsburghers aren't aware of.**
46. On a hot day the air is cooler in Hays Woods than in town. The trees cool the site and also cool the city.
47. Trees and plants provide over 600 acres of carbon sequestration.
48. Hays Woods provides passive stormwater management for the Glass Run and Streets Run watersheds.

Hays Woods as it stands today provides these services for free.

49. **How can we retain the features that make Hays Woods special?**  
There are many questions that the Friends of Hays Woods would like this Task Force to consider.

50. **Can we avoid habitat fragmentation?**  
Map shows the 6 interior forest patches in dark green. The arrow points to the waterfall whose headwaters are a wetland on the plateau.
51. As you can see in this map, the URA's residential section removes part or all of 3 interior forest patches and builds on top of the largest watershed, the one with the waterfall. The destruction of this area is of great concern to the Friends of Hays Woods.

52. **Can we retain the walkable forested areas and overlooks?**  
This map shows the walkable land at Hays Woods. Blacked out are the steep slopes and the bald eagle nesting area that's off limits during the nesting season, December-to-June.
53. Here's what remains of Hays Woods' walkable area if the URA carve-out becomes housing.

54. **Can Hays Woods still look wild from across the river?**  
Hays Woods looks wild because there are no buildings at the edge (top). Mt. Washington has many buildings at the crest (below).

55. **Is it feasible to build at Hays Woods?**  
The geotechnical reports from the Palisades period indicate that the western third of the site is the most challenging to build on. The URA carve-out is within that area. Honeycombed with abandoned mines, Charles Betters had only two choices for developing the site: either grout the mines or remove the overburden. He chose mountaintop removal.
56. In addition, the steep slopes are extremely landslide prone. This rocky slope on East Carson St slid down to the railroad tracks. The URA's winding road to Becks Run will face enormous challenges.

There are many questions to answer as we develop the vision of this new park.

57. We are in a unique position to create an opportunity for the people of Pittsburgh to experience Nature in a big way and not cause harm.
58. Visionary thinking is all that's needed for us to be good stewards of Hays Woods. We are conceiving of an urban park whose design will set a national precedent. **This opportunity will never come again.**

59. Thank you