

Wisconsin School Forest Program

2014 Annual Report



Wisconsin School Forest Vision:

Every student will visit their school forest to enhance their learning in all subject areas and to increase their understanding of sustainable natural resource management and of their role in developing sustainable communities. All school forests will serve as outdoor classrooms that will reconnect students with their natural and human communities through place-based, experiential environmental education.

Wisconsin's School Forests—2014 Overall Statistics

Wisconsin has **412** school forest parcels

There are **238** schools with school forests:

224 public school districts

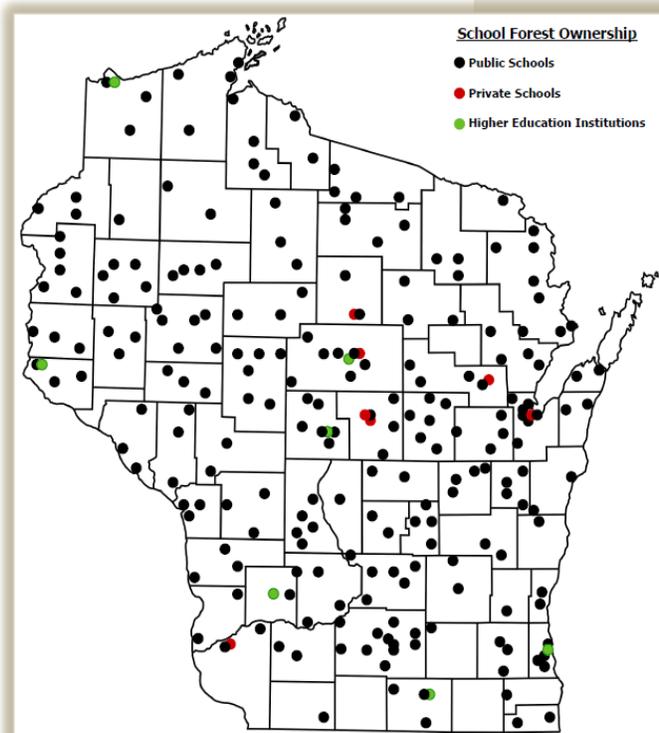
7 private schools

7 higher education institutions

Wisconsin has **96** community forests

Forest management plans are on file for **326** school forests

School forest education plans have been approved for **90** schools



Priority #1: Assist districts in developing & maintaining school forest education plans

Goal 1: School forests will be utilized as curriculum-driven outdoor education sites

Objectives:

- Provide consultation on school forest education plan development
- Update database to track education plan completion
- Annually increase by 10% the number of school districts with an updated school forest education plan
- 15% of School Forest Education plans over 7 years old will be updated
- Annually increase by 10% the number of school districts that are developing a school forest through registration in the program or education plan development.
- Annually increase by 10% the number of students learning at school forests.

Accomplishments

- Consultation on school forest education plan development is continuous and ranges from fielding questions regarding the School Forest Education Plan WEEB grant, to writing the education plan, reviewing the plans as schools are in the writing process, and eventually approving a district's education plan. Schools that receive a WEEB School Forest Education Plan grant or are beginning the process of writing their plans attend a one-day workshop that guides them through the process of writing an education plan. Service was provided to 54 individuals regarding education plans.
- The database is continually updated to reflect completed education plans and track the progress of districts that have begun to write their plans and have them reviewed. In 2014, **nineteen (19) districts received support for their education plans** and five (5) new school forest education plans were approved. This is only a 6% increase in the number of districts with an updated education plan.
- Education plans over 7 years old were not tracked due to a lack of time.
- **Registration assistance was provided to twenty-three (23) different school districts** regarding school forests and one municipality regarding a community forest. Seven (7) of these districts followed through with the registration process. These seven districts, who registered forests, combined with the 19 districts that received support for education plan development, indicates a total of 26 districts that are developing a school forest program. The number of districts developing school forest programs did increase by 10%.
- The School Forest Survey indicated an average of 1,051 students per school district visited their school forest an average of 4 times in the 2013-2014 school year. This number is reflective of the pre-Kindergarten through 12th grade trips to the school forest. This data is compared to 1,080 pre-Kindergarten through 12th grade students who visited the school forest an average of 6 times in the 2012-2013 school year. A 10% increase in the number of students learning at school forests was not validated.



Campbellsport
School Forest



Montello
School Forest



Waupun
School Forest

Goal 2: School forests will demonstrate sustainable natural resource management

Objectives:

- Annually increase by 10% the number of school forests that have an up to date forest management plan.
- Establish at least five school forest programs that add value to forest products for use in the community.
- Conduct at least five school forest learning opportunities, events, lessons, or programs focused on sustainable natural resource management.
- Establish at least five school forest programs that have community members or organizations involved in the forest's natural resource management.

Accomplishments

- A management plan update was completed to provide current information on the number of school forest management plans that exist. A **total of 326 school forest management plans** are on file at the end of 2014. This is a 138% increase. There were **six (6) management plans written** for school forests in 2014.
- Ten (10) school districts indicated on the 2013-2014 School Forest Survey that their students were involved in making value added products from the school forest. Those products included firewood, maple syrup, lumber, and bird houses.
- Learning opportunities that focused on sustainable natural resource management occurred on at least 49 school forests** according to the 2013-2014 school forest survey. Sustainable management topics included tree planting, timber harvest, invasive species control, wildlife projects, trail improvements, and prairie restoration.
- Community members** were involved in natural resource management on at least **thirty-eight (38) school forests** according to the 2013-2014 School Forest Survey.

Goal 3: School forests will be valued by school districts and communities

Objectives:

- Assist with school forest registration and administration
- Annually increase by three the number of school districts with a registered school forest
- No school districts will discontinue their school forest program.
- Annually increase by 10% the number of school districts that host/provide community events.

Accomplishments

- Assistance for school forest educators in the registration process and administration aspects is continuous and ongoing. Registration assistance was provided to 26 schools and 1 municipality. Educators can gain information about the registration process through consultation and the LEAF website. WDNR foresters are contacted about potential new school forests in their region when a new school inquires about the registration process.
- Wisconsin gained eight (8) new school forests properties which are owned by seven (7) different districts:** Freedom*, Green Lake*, Lake Country*, Ithaca*, Madison (Lake View Elementary and Crestwood), Stanley-Boyd, and Owen-Withee. Four (4) of those districts registered a school forest for the first time, as indicated by the (*) following the district name. The annual goal of increasing by three the number of districts with school forests was reached.



Laona
School Forest



Boston
School Forest –
Stevens Point



Laona
School Forest

- Through updating management plan information, DNR foresters indicated that 13 school forest parcels and 5 schools should be removed from the program.
- Community education programs were held on at least 7 school forests.
- **Fifty-two (52) school districts indicated on the 2013-2014 School Forest Survey that community members utilized their school forest.** The greatest number of people who used school forests are members of the general public. The districts indicated boy scouts, girl scouts, church youth groups, hunters, school clubs, local organizations, and school athletic teams also used the school forest. A combined total of 6,332 community members used these school forests. This data is compared to 9,133 community members who used the school forest in the 2012-2013 school year.

Goal 4: Students will understand their role in developing sustainable communities

Objectives:

- Increase students' environmental literacy.
- Increase students' knowledge of sustainable natural resource practices.
- Identify five school forest programs that help students understand the role of the school forest in local community sustainability by demonstrating sustainable behaviors in social, economic, and environmental aspects.

Accomplishments

- Results of the 2013-2014 School Forest Survey indicated that 80% of the respondents agreed that the lessons presented at the school forest increased students' knowledge of natural resource management issues, 85% agreed that students indicated the school forest is a place where they enjoy learning, 90% agreed the school forest increased student learning, and 71% agreed teachers recognized the school forest as a valuable learning environment.
- According to the survey, **40 schools have used the school forest to help students understand the role of the school forest in local community sustainability** by demonstrating sustainable behaviors in social, economic, and environmental aspects.
- Educators responding to the 2013-2014 School Forest Survey listed the following **examples of evidence that students are learning while at the school forest:**
 - "Students who planted trees understood the relationships between deer overgrazing, invasive species, and high seedling mortality of native plants. They understood it well enough to share with others."*
 - "Students learned how to identify disease, mark trees for sale, id species, measure volume and learned careers related to forestry industry in WI."*
 - "Students installed wood duck houses. Students learned about black knot and control of invasives. Students located, identified, and measured champion trees of 15 different species."*
 - "We see greater academic engagement. We are seeing more lessons taught in an applied fashion, thus students are making connections between the classroom and the real world and in this case, the school forest"*
 - "Students using wildlife signs learned at the forest to discover wildlife with their families on weekends"*
 - "High School students interested in pursuing careers in forestry"*
 - "Increased awareness/interest of natural resource careers as evidenced by classroom discussions"*



Paul Brandt
School Forest -
Boscobel



Tomorrow River
School Forest -
Amherst



Oregon
School Forest

Priority #2:

Maintain & improve a public relations and networking plan

Objectives:

- a. Organize meetings with stakeholders. (Examples include: DPI, WEEB, WAEE board, Rep. Friske, CESA Pack, WASB).
- b. Present informational sessions at local, statewide, and regional meetings and conferences
- c. Write and publish article on the value of school forests.
- d. Personally invite SF Coordinators to write stories specific to accomplishments at their school forests and include in publication list above.
- e. Develop a plan to promote school forests around the state that includes ideas for school forest coordinators to promote school forests in their school districts.
- f. Continue school forest awards program
- g. Expand and update the School Forest website
- h. Provide information for quarterly newsletter
- i. Respond to requests for information and resources

Accomplishments

- Fifty-three **(53) school forest outreach opportunities reached 2,807 individuals in Wisconsin in 2014.** School forest information has been shared at meetings, presentations, and conferences with the following partners and organizations: Council on Forestry meetings, Natural Heritage Site Workshop, school forest meetings, WI Society of Science Teachers (WSST), Lakeview Elementary staff in Madison, WI Association for Environ. Education (WAEE), WI Association of Agriculture Educators (WAAE), the Midwest Renewable Energy Association's Energy Fair, Central Wisconsin Nature Collaborative meeting, the Sustainable Forest Resource Management Network, and the WI Env. Educ. Board (WEEB).
- Media releases are sent to newspapers and the LEAFlet regarding school forests events, news, local fieldtrips, school forest registration, and school forest award winners. School forest educators are invited to write and submit stories. School Forest News that is sent at the beginning of the school year.
- A major story was featured in the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel this year regarding school forests in Wisconsin.
- There were no nominations for school forest awards this year. The award timeframe has been altered and nominations have been re-opened with the intention to present them in the spring of 2015.
- The School Forest website is continually updated as the need arises. The environmental monitoring webpages were updated to help educators find relevant citizen science projects.
- School forest information is regularly provided for the LEAFlet, which is distributed every two weeks. Highlights from site visits are included and useful information is shared. Other general school forest information includes introducing new school forests, how to order seedlings, information about WEEB grants, and lesson ideas.
- Educators and resource professionals throughout the state regularly contact the program for information and resources. Consultation is critical to the success of the program and constitutes a vast majority of time. **Consultation services were provided to 305 individuals from 120 different school districts** throughout Wisconsin. **One hundred eight (108) registered school forests and twelve (12) potential school forests were served.** Work was done in conjunction with **63 WDNR foresters, 19 other WDNR individuals, and an additional 21 partnership/outreach opportunities** that are not captured in the school district, school forest, and DNR forester totals.



Waupun
School Forest



Lake View Elementary
School Forest -
Madison



Newman Catholic
School Forest

Priority #3:

Maintain & Improve professional development/in-service programs

Objectives:

- Provide training and networking opportunities for school forest educators.
- Update and deliver School Forest Programs and Administration Course
- Assist with marketing of LEAF workshops
- Support partner program trainings

Accomplishments

- Seventeen (18) professional development opportunities were offered and reached at least 248 people.** These opportunities include school forest education plan workshops, NRES 622, NRES 624, school district in-services, and field trips at the WSST and WAEE conferences.
- Both the NRES 622 School Forest Programs and Administration (5 students) and NRES 624 Enhancing School Forest Education courses (10 students) were delivered in the summer.
- All school forest educators (approximately 350+) individuals listed in the school forest database receive information via e-mail about LEAF's professional development opportunities, workshops, and resources. School districts with school forests have at least one identified primary contact that all information is sent to. Many districts have two, even three or more contact which receive school forest, LEAF, and WCEE information. Also, all school forest educators listed in the database also receive the LEAFlet electronic newsletter twice a month.
- Partner program trainings for Green and Healthy Schools, PLT, Project WET, Project WILD, and the Wisconsin Nature Center Collaborative were promoted and supported in 2014.

Priority #4: Continue development of a strategy for school forest program evaluation & assessment

Objectives:

- Modify and conduct the Annual School Forest Survey

Accomplishments

- The annual school forest survey was modified based on feedback and new questions were added to inform the Program's objectives. It was once again delivered as a school-year survey. The survey was distributed in May and due in June. **Seventy-nine (79) individual schools or districts provided responses to the survey out of 232 individual schools** or districts that received the survey. Responses were received from 75 public school districts, 3 private schools, and 1 higher education institution. This is a 34% response rate. A complete overview of the survey results is available upon request.



Kimberly
School Forest



Green Lake Educators
Boston School Forest –
Stevens Point



Baldwin-Woodville
School Forest

Priority #5: Visit school forests

Objectives:

- a. Visit school forests – expand geographic areas visited

Accomplishments

- **Site visits were conducted at twenty-three (23) different school forests in eighteen (18) different counties.** School forests that were visited include: Madison, La Crosse (Summit Elementary), Boston (Stevens Point), Amherst, Newman Catholic, Kenosha, DC Everest, Edgar, Campbellsport, Elcho, Pulaski, Waupun, Black River Falls, UW Richland, Boscobel, Oregon, Montello, Laona, Kimberly, Pittsville, Baldwin-Woodville, Amery, and Lake View Elementary (Madison). Visiting these school forests helps build relationships among the Wisconsin School Forest Program and educators in these districts. It is also extremely informative in allowing the WI School Forest Program to network educators across the state and stay up to date on the type of programming that takes place at various school forests.

Priority #6:

Examine funding opportunities for individual school forests

Objectives:

- a. Assist DNR-Forestry with development of school forest transportation grant program
- b. Provide information about Wisconsin school forests to relevant state and national foundations
- c. Continue to work with WEEB to set priorities and provide support for the school forest grants program
- d. Develop additional funding ideas

Accomplishments

- WEEB grant promotion and consultation is provided to school forests that are in the process of writing and implementing a grant.
- The school forest coordinator is a member of the WEEB grant committee
- Fund-raising ideas for school forests are collected and distributed to the school forest distribution list as they become available. Sites such as einwisconsin.org are also promoted and distributed.
- Information is provided to state and national organizations and individuals regarding school forests upon request.

The Wisconsin School Forest Program is coordinated within the LEAF Program. LEAF is a partnership between the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources-Division of Forestry and the Wisconsin Center for Environmental Education at the College of Natural Resources, University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point.



Wisconsin Center for Environmental Education
College of Natural Resources
University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point



Toki/Orchard Ridge
Educators at Boston
School Forest –
Stevens Point



Boscobel
School Forest

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