

Ten years ago the Wisconsin forestry community came together to request a comprehensive program to support forestry education in Wisconsin's schools. The result was legislation that established the LEAF program—Learning, Experiences, and Activities in Forestry—a partnership between the state Division of Forestry and the Wisconsin Center for Environmental Education at the College of Natural Resources at University of Wisconsin–Stevens Point.

Over the past decade, the LEAF program has grown and evolved to be one of the strongest and most highly respected K-12 forestry education programs in the country. Most important, the program continues to advance and strengthen K-12 forestry education in Wisconsin schools. LEAF partners with other forestry education stakeholders in the state, such as Wisconsin SAF, Wisconsin Sustainable Forestry Initiative, and Trees For Tomorrow, to advance forestry education.

“LEAF’s focus is on classroom teachers and entire schools,” said LEAF director Jeremy Solin. “We provide teachers with professional development, curriculum resources, support for school forests and outdoor classrooms, and networking opportunities designed to enhance learning in and about Wisconsin’s forests.”

LEAF provides professional development for about 800 teachers each year at all grade levels and subject areas from pre-kindergarten to 12th grade and from art to social studies.

“We like to think of teacher professional development as a pathway. Our goal is to engage teachers at various points on this path and keep them moving toward forestry literacy,” said Solin.

LEAF offers a range of options for teachers, such as two-hour, whole-school in-service events; two-day graduate-level courses; and year-long programs for teams of teachers. This variety helps to engage teachers at different levels and advances the forestry understanding and knowledge of all teachers involved. Ac-

ording to Solin, LEAF’s evaluations have shown that nearly 90 percent of teachers who participate in LEAF professional development teach about forests and forestry when they return to the classroom, even years after they participate in the workshop. As a result, tens of thousands of students learn about Wisconsin forestry every year, and the number continues to grow.

Curriculum Resources

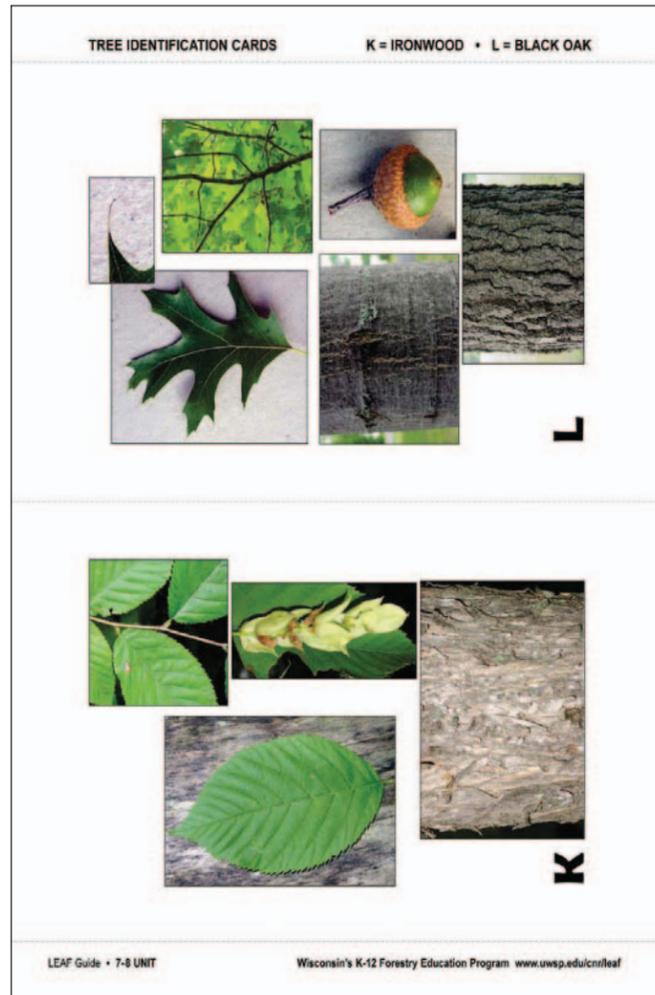
Teachers are always looking for curriculum resources that are relevant and help them effectively teach content that is required by the district, based on state education standards. LEAF has met this need with extensive curriculum resources that are specifically about Wisconsin’s forests and are aligned with Wisconsin’s standards. The LEAF Forestry Education Lesson Guides cover grade-specific content and skills relevant to Wisconsin’s forests. LEAF also has Urban Forest and Wildland Fire lesson guides that address those specific topics.

The foundation for these lesson guides was provided by forestry stakeholders. In 2002, people from the forest industry, schools, conservation organizations, and government came together to identify what students should know about Wisconsin’s forests and forest management.

“The result of that input was the ‘Conceptual Guide to K-12 Forestry Education in Wisconsin.’ This process was repeated for the urban forests and wildland fire topics as well. The curriculum resources developed from the conceptual guides have been distributed to over 4,000 teachers, and teachers can now access these and additional materials online,” said Solin.

In addition to providing curriculum resources, LEAF personnel encourage networking between teachers. One new tool in that effort is an online networking facility.

“We hope to keep the thousands of teachers utilizing LEAF services and materials connected,” said Solin. “In addition to our traditional networking approaches



Tree identification cards like this one, provided by the Wisconsin Learning, Experiences, and Activities in Forestry (LEAF) program, help K-12 teachers and students learn about forests.

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such as field days and a newsletter, the online network will allow teachers to access additional curriculum materials, share information about their teaching strategies, learn more about Wisconsin’s forests, and connect with other teachers who have similar interests.”



The Wisconsin Learning, Experiences, and Activities in Forestry (LEAF) program’s forestry lesson guide for high school students covers such topics as forest ecosystem processes, succession, and the economics of forest products. Materials include a publication titled “Marketplace Matters: Understanding the Economic Value of Wisconsin’s Forests.”

School Forests

Many people who grew up in Wisconsin have a school memory of planting trees at a school forest, the first of

which was established in 1928. Today, 211 public school districts—about half of the districts in the state—have a school forest, as do 9 private schools and 7 colleges and universities. Through the LEAF program, these school forests now provide extensive outdoor education for tens of thousands of students annually, and each year LEAF staff help about 100 school districts enhance or develop their lands by connecting school forests with resource professionals to help them develop management plans. More than 20 percent of the school forests that responded to a 2011 LEAF survey had conducted timber harvests. Demonstrating sustainable forest management is one of the key activities of school forests across the state, Solin said.

LEAF staff members have recently begun to help schools better utilize their school grounds.

“The new LEAF School Grounds program will support outdoor classrooms on school grounds. This will provide additional students with opportunities to learn outdoors through a variety of activities that may include tree planting, developing habitat gardens, and natural landscaping projects,” Solin said.

According to Solin, one teacher described LEAF’s overall school-forest program this way: “What we have at this point is a school/community forest that is ‘owned’ by all of us. This is truly a positive force in connecting the students, staff, and the citizens of two towns. It’s a win-win situation.”

You can learn more about the LEAF Program at www.uwsp.edu/cnr/leaf. Contact Solin at jsolin@uwsp.edu or (715) 346-4907.