Ten years ago the Wisconsin forestry community came together to request a comprehensive program to support forestry education in Wisconsin 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 become 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 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 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 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 in Wisconsin schools.

“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. According 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 forestry 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 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 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/leaf. Contact Solin at jsolin@uwsp.edu or (715) 346-4907.

Society Affairs

LEAF: Wisconsin’s K–12 Forestry Education Program

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