

Wisconsin School Forest Program

2017 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. 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—2017 Overall Statistics

Wisconsin has **425** school forest parcels

There are **247** schools with school forests:

234 public school districts

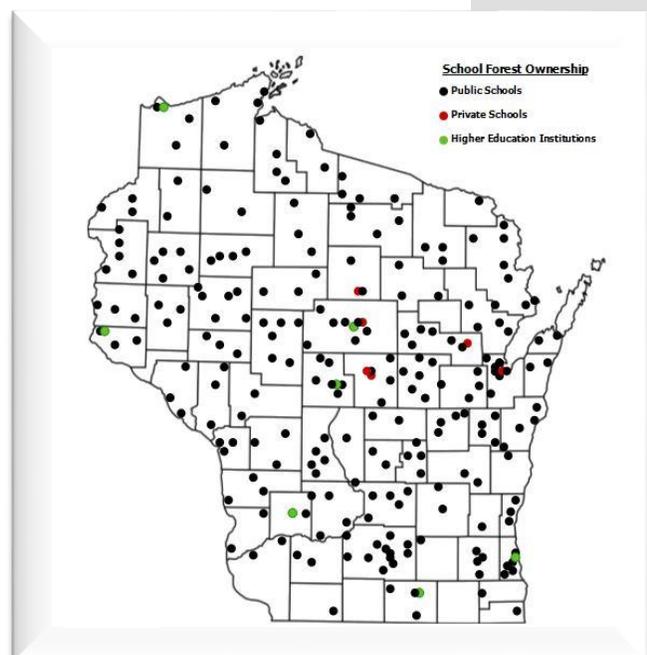
6 private schools

7 higher education institutions

Wisconsin has **96** community forests

Forest management plans are on file for **341** school forests

School forest education plans have been approved for **109** 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 has changed drastically since grants through WEEB are no longer available for teachers to write education plans. Service was provided to 5 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 2017, **five (5) districts received support for their education plans** and two (2) new school forest education plans were approved. This is a 1.8% 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 eight (8) different school districts** regarding school forests and three (3) municipalities regarding community forests. Three (3) of these districts followed through with the registration process. These 3 districts, who registered forests, combined with the 5 districts that received support for education plan development, indicates 8 districts were developing a school forest program in 2017. The number of districts developing school forest programs did not increase by 10%.
- The School Forest Survey indicated an average of 1,081 students visited their school forest an average of 4.35 times in the 2016-2017 school year. This number is reflective of the pre-Kindergarten through 12th grade trips to the school forest. This data is compared to an average of 1202 pre-Kindergarten through 12th grade students who visited the school forest an average of 4.1 times in the 2015-2016 school year.



Iola Scandinavia
School Forest



Chequamegon School Forest
(Park Falls)

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 **total of 341 school forest management plans** are on file at the end of 2017. This is a 0.3% increase. There **was one (1) management plan written** for school forests in 2017.
- Ten (10) school districts indicated on the 2016-2017 School Forest Survey that their students were involved in making value added products from the school forest. Those products included firewood, benches, maple syrup, furniture, Christmas wreaths, lumber, and bird houses.
- Learning opportunities that focused on sustainable natural resource management occurred on at least 65 school forests** according to the 2016-2017 school forest survey. Sustainable management topics included timber cruising, forest restoration, 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 **forty-four (44) school forests** according to the 2016-2017 School Forest Survey.

Northland Pines
School Forest
(Eagle River)

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 10 schools and 3 municipalities. 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 five (5) new school forests properties that are owned by three (3) different districts:** Bowler*, Merrill, and Stevens Point. One (1) 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 accomplished.



Suamico
School Forest

- One school forest was removed this year and one community forest decreased the number of acres registered. Wilmot Union School District removed its registered parcel. The City of Wisconsin Rapids Water Works and Lighting Commission sold 80 acres of a parcel, but 185 acres of that parcel still remain registered in the system.
- Community education programs were held on at least 35 school forests.
- **Sixty-one (61) school districts indicated on the 2016-2017 School Forest Survey that community members utilized their school forest.** A 10% increase in the number of students learning at school forests did occur. 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 and government organizations, parent volunteers, and school athletic teams also used the school forest. A combined total of 9,334 community members used these school forests. This data is compared to 7,374 community members who used the school forest in the 2015-2016 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.



Suamico School Forest

Accomplishments

- Results of the 2016-2017 School Forest Survey indicated that 81% of the respondents agreed that the lessons presented at the school forest increased students' knowledge of natural resource management issues, 89% agreed that students indicated the school forest is a place where they enjoy learning, 89% agreed the school forest increased student learning, and 82% agreed teachers recognized the school forest as a valuable learning environment.
- According to the survey, **63 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 2016-2017 School Forest Survey listed the following **examples of evidence that students are learning while at the school forest:**
 - "Students learned how to use timber cruising tools, as well as identify tree species in summer and winter."*
 - "My students use the information gathered in their writing at school. They add details from the trip to discussions as they arise in the classroom. We have been talking about the alphabet and are approaching this learning with the names of flowers. Students connected the flowers we hunted for at the forest to the flowers in the book we were reading"*
 - "When we logged the forest the class calculated the profit for the school district while considering cost, profit, and other variables. Students learned about the economic and environmental impacts of area forests."*
 - "Reports of students participating in activities at home with family after attending classes at school forest. Teachers report increased engagement and improved writing when journaling at school forest compared to in class writing prompts."*

Priority #2:

Maintain & improve a public relations and networking plan

Objectives:

- a. Organize meetings with stakeholders.
- 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

- **Thirty (30) school forest outreach opportunities reached 2,164 individuals in Wisconsin in 2017.** School forest information has been shared at meetings, presentations, and conferences with the following partners and organizations: Council on Forestry meetings, school forest meetings, WI Society of Science Teachers (WSST), WI Association of Agriculture Educators (WAAE), the Sustainable Resources Institute, Wisconsin Woodland Owners Association (WWOA), and UWSP College of Natural Resources Undergraduate Courses.
- Media releases are sent to newspapers and the LEAF's social media outlets regarding school forest events, news, local fieldtrips, school forest registration, and school forest award winners. School forest educators are invited to write and submit stories in their local communities as well.
- School forest awards were presented to teacher Rhonda Fechter and the students of the Tracy Lake Ruffed Grouse and Woodcock Habitat Team.
- The School Forest website is updated as the need arises.
- School forest information is regularly provided for the Wisconsin Center for Environmental Education's electronic newsletter called the News to Note, which is distributed monthly. 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 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 139 individuals from 109 different school districts** throughout Wisconsin. **One hundred six (106) registered school forests and three (3) potential school forests were served.** Work was done in conjunction with **23 WDNR foresters, 15 other WDNR individuals, and an additional 43 partnership/outreach contacts** that are not captured in the school district, school forest, and DNR forester totals.

School Forest Award Winners



Class ACT Charter School
Chequamegon School District
Park Falls



Rhonda Fechter
Iola Scandinavia
School Forest

Priority #3:

Maintain & Improve professional development/in-service programs

Objectives:

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

Accomplishments

- **Four (4) professional development opportunities were offered and reached at least 71 people.** These opportunities include workshops, school district in-services, and a session at the WSST conference.
- Neither the NRES 622 School Forest Programs and Administration or NRES 624 Enhancing School Forest Education courses were offered 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 contacts receive the WCEE's News To Note electronic newsletter once a month.
- Partner program trainings for Green and Healthy Schools, PLT, and UW Extension's First Detector Network were promoted and supported in 2017.



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

Objectives:

- a. Modify and conduct the Annual School Forest Survey

Accomplishments

- The annual school forest survey is delivered as a school-year survey. The survey was distributed in May and due in June. **Eighty-eight (88) individual schools or districts provided responses to the survey out of 241 individual schools** or districts that received the survey. Responses were received from 84 public school districts, 3 private schools, and 1 higher education institution. This is a 36% response rate. As a result, this survey serves as a "snapshot" of school forest activity in Wisconsin, not as a comprehensive report. However, due to the fact that not all school forests submit data and that not all of the same school forests submit data every year, we can observe general trends throughout certain questions that were asked in the survey, but do not assume that these are precise and final numbers. This report is merely a representation of Wisconsin's School Forest Program over the past year. A complete overview of the survey results is available upon request.



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Priority #5: Visit school forests

Objectives:

- a. Visit school forests – expand geographic areas visited

Accomplishments

- **Site visits occurred at six (6) different school forests in six (6) different counties.** School forests that were visited include: Boston (Stevens Point), Northland Pines (Eagle River), Wisconsin Rapids, Chequamegon (Park Falls), Iola Scandinavia, and Suamico. 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 a 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 is no longer in existence.
- Promotion was provided for the Natural Resource Foundation's GO (Get Outdoors) Fund. This grant supported field trip costs in forestry education, which included money specifically for school forests.
- 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. In 2017 school forest information was provided at the Society of American Foresters National Convention, at the Wisconsin Society of Science Teacher Conference, to visiting professionals from a German School Forest, the Natural Resources Foundation, and at the Wisconsin Association of Agriculture Educators Professional Development Conference.

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.



Boston School Forest
(Stevens Point)



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



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