



Wisconsin School Forest Education Plan Outline

School forests are incredible education resources. However, often, they are not utilized to their full potential. A variety of reasons exist as to why this is true. One reason is that teachers, administrators, and the community have not determined how the school forest fits into the district's curriculum and how it can be used to enhance student learning. The school forest education plan is the tool to make these connections.

This document presents an established, approved outline for school forest education plan development. This outline provides the structure and description for the components of a school forest education plan. **The majority of the components of the outline are required to be completed to have an official education plan.** However, a few components are just recommendations. These are marked with an asterisk (*).

Education Plan Structure:

- 1) Rationale
- 2) Site description and opportunities
- 3) Educational connections
- 4) Sustaining the school forest program

NOTE: The school forest education plan provides the foundation for the development of a school forest curriculum, but is not, in itself, a curriculum.

A variety of **incentives** are available to registered school forests that have officially recognized, current education and management plans. These incentives are also available to registered school forests that use these resources as part of their education or management plan development. These include:

- Free seed and seedlings from the state nursery program
- Eligibility for other Wisconsin Environmental Education Board (WEEB) school forest grants
- Resources through the Wisconsin School Forest Program

A sample education plan and a needs assessment are also available. You can access these documents on-line at: http://www.uwsp.edu/cnr/leaf/Schoolforests/sf_education_plan.aspx

If you have any questions about this education plan outline, please contact the Forestry & Outdoor Education Specialist with the LEAF program at: 715-346-2633 or Gretchen.Marshall@uwsp.edu



Acknowledgements....



The outline was developed in collaboration with educators and administrators from across the state and was reviewed by outdoor education and resource management professionals.

The school forest education plan outline was created through the efforts of many individuals and organizations. The Wisconsin Forest Resources Education Alliance (WFREA) and the Learning, Experiences, & Activities (LEAF) program were the coordinators for this project. Funding was provided by the Wisconsin Environmental Education Board (WEEB).

Participants in the focus group that drafted the components of the education plan were:

Patty Brodeen, Manitowoc School District

Karen Dostal, Stevens Point School District

Larry Mancl, Tri-County School District

Barb Thompson, West Salem School District

Victoria Dahlby, Portage School District

Eden Koljord, WFREA

Jeremy Solin, LEAF

Sterling Strathe, LEAF





1) RATIONALE

The rationale will provide the background information and justification for why and how the school forest education program will be developed. The rationale should give readers a basic understanding of why your school forest is important, what topics the education programs will cover, and why the school forest program needs to be developed.

Value statement

The value statement describes why outdoor environmental education (EE) and the school forest are important. This should utilize the existing research that has determined that environmental education increases test scores and attendance while decreasing behavioral problems. The statement should be broad enough to include all grade levels and subject areas in the school district.

Target messages

Target messages are the broad themes/topics that will be covered at the school forest. Educational goals and specific learner objectives will be addressed in the “educational connections” section.

An example target message: Humans are part of the natural world.

Needs assessment results

The needs assessment results provide the basis for developing the school forest program. This should include information such as:

- Interest in using the school forest among teachers, administrators, and/or students
- Barriers to using the school forest
- Knowledge base and comfort of teachers related to outdoor EE
- Logistics needs, e.g., restrooms, transportation, safety

An example needs assessment can be accessed on-line at:

http://www.uwsp.edu/cnr/leaf/Schoolforests/sf_education_plan.aspx. Choose the Needs Assessment link or the example located under the Berlin School Forest Needs Assessment Results link.



2) SITE DESCRIPTION AND OPPORTUNITIES

In this section the site and educational opportunities provided by the site will be described. It includes the site description and location, site history, and site management goals.

Site description & location

Describe the location and major features of the site.

Recommended features to include are:

- Map of and directions to the school forest in relation to the school district facilities
- Legal description and size
- Map of major community types (e.g., forest, wetland, lakes, prairie)
- Description and location of unique site features (e.g., unusual/rare plants, exceptional wildlife habitat, scenic areas)
- Facilities on the school forest
- The educational opportunities provided by the site

***Site history**

The stories provided by the natural and cultural history of the site can provide exciting educational opportunities. If possible, include some of this information as it can really enhance students' sense of place. This can be expanded as the program is developed – it's a great opportunity to get students involved. Include:

- Cultural history (pre-historic to present day human use of the school forest)
- Natural history (e.g., geology, ecology, climate)

***Site management**

Educational goals should drive the management of the school forest. This section can help establish the connection between the education plan and the management plan. Include the key goals, objectives, and other recommendations for management. Also, indicate how management activities will be used to educate students.



3) EDUCATIONAL CONNECTIONS

This section is the heart of the education plan. The educational connections will build on the rationale and site description and will provide the foundation for development of a school forest curriculum. The school forest should be an extension of the classroom. Utilize the school forest to teach what can be best taught outdoors through experiential activities.

Key concepts

List the key learning concepts for students at the school forest. These are educational goals from which learning objectives will be developed. *Example: Sustainable natural resource management aims to provide essential resources, enhance local communities, and protect the health of the land.*

Classroom curriculum connections

Provide the connections from the key concepts to be taught at the school forest to what concepts are already being taught in the classroom. List in what grade (and, if useful, during what time of the year) concepts (some districts call them performance objectives) are covered. This will essentially take the form of a scope and sequence. *Example: Organize and display data (Sixth grade, Math)*

Site connections

List learning objectives that can be taught, demonstrated, and/or experienced at the school forest. These objectives should relate to a key concept and be an outgrowth of the curriculum connection. It is highly recommended to utilize the forest management plan and connect to resource management activities. *Example: Measure and graph the diameter of trees in the pine plantation.*

Alignment with state standards

Align the curriculum/site connection with appropriate state standards. *Example: Measuring and graphing the diameter of trees addresses math standard E.8.2*

Staff development

Provide a professional development strategy for district staff based on the key concepts to be covered and the information provided by the needs assessment. Include: what topics will be covered (forest ecology, etc), format, location (best if at school forest), time, who will deliver the (name or organization).

Resources

List the people, materials, on-site facilities, etc. that are available and those that are needed to implement the education plan.

Assessment

Determine how the success of the school forest program will be assessed, e.g., # of students utilizing the school forest, specific student learning, standardized test scores.



4) SUSTAINING THE SCHOOL FOREST PROGRAM

The information in this section will assist in long-term maintenance of the school forest program and will provide for continuity in case of staffing or funding changes.

School forest committee

Establishing a school forest committee is perhaps the most important activity to assist in the development and maintenance of the program. The school forest committee should include individuals that represent diverse grade levels, subject areas, administration, and community partners. List the school forest committee members and their roles.

It is also recommended that committee responsibilities be developed and assigned. These responsibilities should be considered:

- Financial aspects – who’s responsible for keeping track of school forest finances
- Site development and maintenance, e.g., facilities, trails, educational materials
- District personnel structure, e.g., who is the school forest coordinator, who has responsibilities for grounds
- Threats to & opportunities for the school forest program – who’s going to be looking at the “big picture”
- Education plan review annually (update every 3-5 years)
- Management plan review annually (update at least every 10 years)
- Committee personnel review – who’s responsible for ensuring diverse representation is maintained
- Incentives/support for on-going involvement/utilization of school forest

Communication

Develop a strategy for how the value, needs, and successes will be shared with teachers, administrators and the community to build support for the school forest program. The communication plan should span the length time of the education plan.

Long-range plan

List long-range goals for the school forest program. It is recommended to include goals that will take varying lengths of time and effort to accomplish, i.e., more easily attainable, short-term goals and “pie in the sky,” long-term goals. *Example: Long-term goal: school forest lodge; short-term goal: school forest curriculum.*

Implementation plan

Develop a plan, including a timeline, to implement the education plan and other components identified in the long-range vision. Include key activities and resources (human and/or financial) needed to implement specific components. *When will the curriculum be developed, who will create it, what resources are needed to accomplish this?...etc.*

*District commitment

Get district commitment of the school forest program via school board adoption of the school forest education plan, school forest rationale section, or letter of commitment.