



# Wisconsin's K-12 Forestry Education Program

Article written by Jeremy Solin, LEAF

**Ten** years ago the 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 as a partnership between the DNR – Division of Forestry and the Wisconsin Center for Environmental Education in the College of Natural Resources at UW-Stevens Point.

Over the past ten years, 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. But, most importantly, LEAF continues to advance and strengthen K-12 forestry education in Wisconsin schools. LEAF partners with other forestry education providers in the



Mosinee students heading into their school forest to learn.



UW-Green Bay botanist and Goodman-Armstrong Creek alum Gary Fewless helps students identify plants in the school forest.

state such as Tree For Tomorrow and Project Learning Tree to address the full range of audiences including students, practicing teachers, and pre-service teachers. LEAF's focus is practicing teachers and full schools. We provide teacher professional development, curriculum resources, support for school forests and outdoor classrooms, and teacher networking to enhance learning in and about Wisconsin's forests.

### **Professional development**

LEAF provides professional development for about 700 teachers each year. These teachers cover 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. LEAF offers a range of options from 2-hour whole school in-services to 2-day graduate level courses for teachers to 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. Evaluation has

shown that 80%-90% 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.

### **Curriculum resources**

Teachers are always looking for curriculum resources that are relevant and help them effectively teach required content. LEAF has developed extensive curriculum resources that are specifically about Wisconsin's forests and are aligned with Wisconsin's education 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 all of these lesson guides was provided by people like you. In 2002, people from the forest industry, schools, conservation organizations, and governments came together to identify what students should know about Wisconsin's forests and forest management. The result of that input was the

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Conceptual Guide to K-12 Forestry Education in Wisconsin. This process was repeated for the urban forests and wildland fire topics as well. These curriculum resources have been distributed to over 4,000 teachers and teachers can now access these (and additional) materials on-line.

## School forests and school grounds

If you grew up in Wisconsin, you might have a school memory of planting trees at a school forest. For much of the history of school forests (which go back to 1928), that was the primary activity that happened there. But through the LEAF Program, school forests are now utilized as exceptional outdoor education sites for tens of thousands of students each year. About half of the districts in the state have a school forest. Each year, LEAF staff help about 100 school districts enhance or develop their lands. And, each year the program continues to grow in the number of registered school forest parcels and the use of those lands. LEAF supports the development of education programs and also connects school forests with resource professionals to help them develop management plans. Last year, over 20% of the school forests responding to the annual school forest survey conducted timber harvests. Demonstrating sustainable forest management is one of the key activities of school forests across the state.

LEAF is taking our success in supporting school forests to 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.

## Networking

We hope to keep the thousands of teachers utilizing LEAF services and materials connected. In addition to our traditional networking approaches such as field days and a newsletter, we are developing an on-line network. The on-line 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.

## Goodman-Armstrong Creek School District

Goodman-Armstrong Creek is a small school district in western Marinette County (northeastern WI) that LEAF has worked with for the past 3 years.



Attendees of the LEAF field day weigh forest biomass with Ken Lallemont.

We are leveraging the full-range of LEAF resources and services to support this school's effort to use the school forest and community as the setting for their learning. That is, student learning will be done through the use of the community and school forest and students will be involved in learning projects that

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Teachers participating in Forests For Every Classroom learn about logging and forest management with Dennis Schoeneck.

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benefit the community. LEAF is providing teacher professional development, planning support, curriculum resources, and model teaching and mentoring through a LEAF staff member to help accomplish this effort.

Our partnership has been successful getting teachers and students outdoors as is evidenced by one student, who stated “It was fun to drill a hole in the tree and put the tap in and watch the sap fall out into a bag. I’ve been in the school forest this year more than all my other years combined.” LEAF has also helped the teachers connect with and explore the potential of using the school forest and community. This is how one teacher related the success of the project so far: “...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.”

## Conclusion

LEAF is effectively advancing K-12 forestry education in the state. Our teachers are teaching and students are learning more about Wisconsin’s forests and forest management than ever before. However, we still have a long way to go. LEAF will be active until all of the teachers and students in the state are actively engaged in sustaining healthy forests and communities. You can help by letting teachers know about the LEAF program and promoting LEAF curriculum materials and professional development with schools in your areas. You can learn more about the LEAF Program at [www.uwsp.edu/cnr/leaf](http://www.uwsp.edu/cnr/leaf) or contact Jeremy Solin, director, at [jsolin@uwsp.edu](mailto:jsolin@uwsp.edu) or 715-346-4907. ▲