

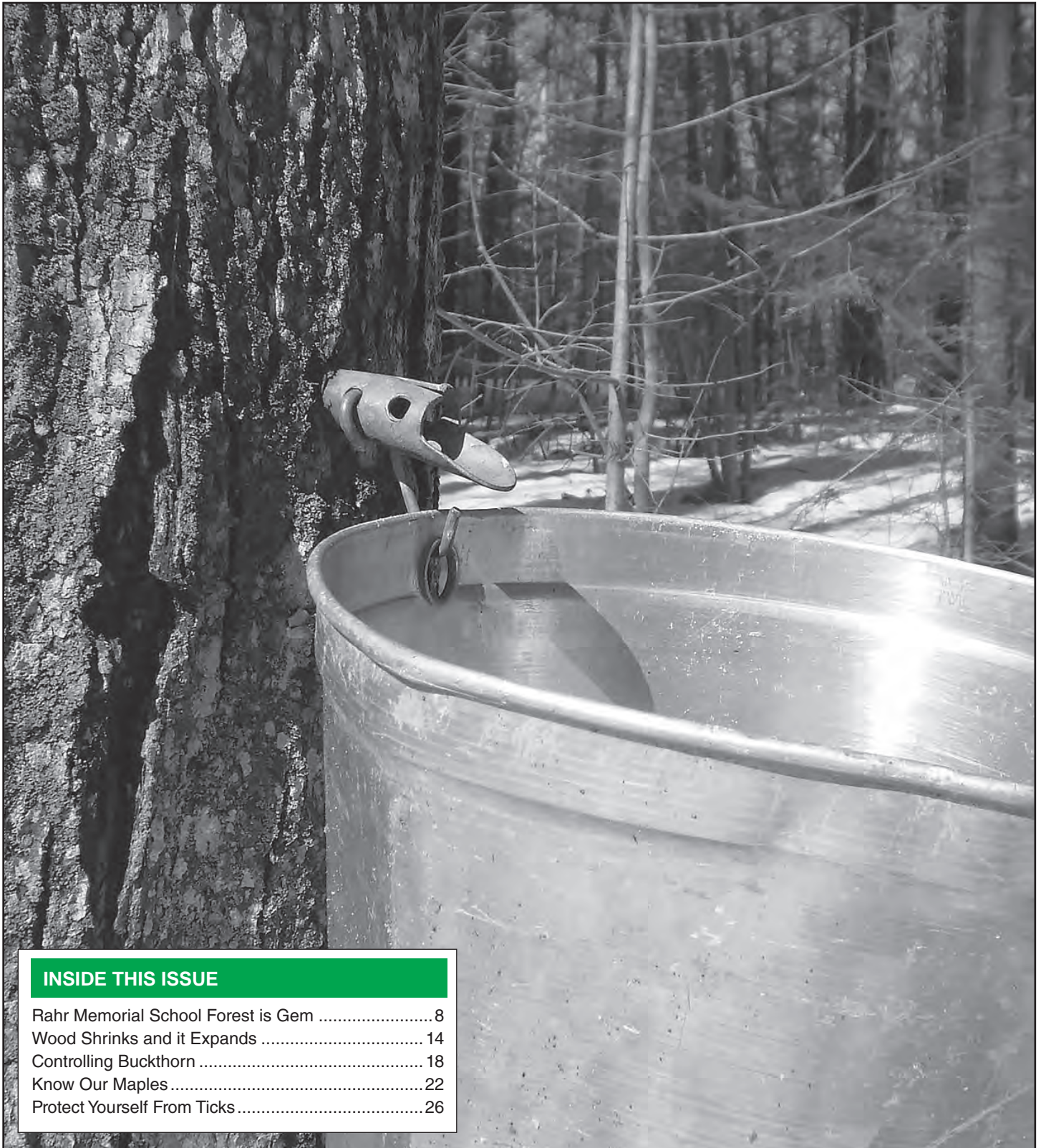
Wisconsin



Woodlands

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Creating Tomorrow's Woodlands Today

Lakefront site is school forest gem

Manitowoc's Rahr Memorial Forest features biodiversity

By Stephen Schmidt

On the east coastal edge of Wisconsin lies Manitowoc's school forest gem: Rahr Memorial School Forest. Biodiversity can best be observed on nature's edges and this nearly 300-acre forest has them. Five miles of well-marked trails make navigation a cinch through a swamp with a 1,500-foot boardwalk, pine-juniper scrub uplands, lowland



alder, silver maple and ash stands, sand dune ridge and swale habitats, and a ¼-mile length of Lake Michigan beach. This complex of habitats is

not ideal for timber harvest and is primarily managed for diverse flora and fauna, and, of course, student learning.

To fully appreciate the forest, a little historical context is helpful. As with the first school forests in northcentral Wisconsin, student and community enthusiasm for conservation and The School Forest Idea was stirred by tree planting. Students in fifth and sixth grade at Madison School in Manitowoc planted trees at nearby Silver Creek Park in 1950. Enthusiasm surrounding this project led to more planting projects at Point Beach State Forest and a growing group of local leaders began a plan to purchase land for the school to grow its own forest. A detailed account can be found in

Rahr Forest facts

- Certified: 1955
- Total Acres: 293
- District Enrollment: >5,000, with 10,000 annual student visits
- <http://www.manitowocpublic-schools.org>



Photos: Steve Schmidt and Facebook

A sign marks the Rahr Memorial School Forest entrance behind a field of yellow coreopsis and daisies. Below: A student searches for beach treasures at the Manitowoc public school site.

“Rahr Memorial School Forest History” by the late Eugene Krejcarek, a former teacher and principal and one of the leaders in the Manitowoc School Forest movement. Since the first property was purchased in 1955 with funding provided by the Rahr Foundation, several other tracts

have been added, as well as buildings that serve as classrooms and lodging for students and staff. Since those early school forest years through today, the mission has been to foster a love of learning and the outdoors in all students



who visit.

All students learn at the school forest at least once per year. Perhaps their favorite spots, aside from time on the beach, are the dune complexes. While students are careful to keep off the



Wisconsin threatened sand reedgrass, *Calamovilfa longifolia*, there are dunes where they can play or even sled in winter. On the beach, students search for fossils and other interesting treasures washed by the surf and scrubbed by the sand. Aside from the regular visits by students, the other big activity is a biannual forest festival next scheduled for 2019. Check the district website at <http://www.manitowocpublicschools.org> for details.

- **Access:** Head to the lake on County Road V east of Highway 42. At the school forest sign, turn north on Sandy Bay Road and park along the road by the gate. The no trespassing sign



Rahr Memorial School Forest is nearly 300-acres and includes 5 miles of well-marked trails and a 1,500-foot boardwalk through a swamp.

refers to the buildings beyond the gate; trails are open during daylight. A trail map is accessible online and posted at spots along the trail.

- **Contact:** Kelly Vorrone, vorronek@mps.k12.wi.us; 920-686-4777 🌲

Stephen Schmidt, a state-certified science educator and instructor at Northcentral Technical College, is also an educational outreach specialist for LEAF, Wisconsin's K-12 Forestry Education Program.

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