

School Forest Vandalism

Vandalism on school forests is not common and it should not discourage development of your outdoor classroom. Unfortunately, though, it does happen. While, there is no way to guarantee that vandalism won't occur in your school forest, there are things you can do to limit its occurrence. Following are a few ideas to discourage vandalism at your school forest.

Student involvement. Most vandals are teenagers. They are not likely to destroy something they helped create or on which they place a value. Getting students involved and building a sense of ownership and pride in the school forest is by far the most proactive method that can be taken to decrease vandalism.

Signage. Signs relay that the site is special and that it is used and maintained. Include contact information if any problems are encountered at the forest.

Site maintenance. Maintaining the school forest also demonstrates that it is important and that it is utilized. Any vandalism is more likely to stand out in a well-maintained forest.

Personal connections. Have students write their names on projects. Connecting a project with a specific person can discourage vandalism, especially if it's a friend's or sibling's project. For example, place a small sign next to a tree with the names of the planters or have students write their names on birdhouses they construct.

Usage. Encourage legitimate use of the school forest by school and community groups. This helps build connection to the school forest and also provides more watchful eyes. The forest isn't likely to be vandalized while a group is using it.

Clear view. When possible, place objects in easily observed locations. Vandals don't like to be seen and generally avoid areas where they can be easily observed. Of course, this isn't easily done in the middle of the forest; however, objects like the main school forest sign should be located in an opening that is easily viewed from the road.

Community involvement. Build a community connection to the school forest by including community members in the development and maintenance of the forest. Organize community clean-up days. Ask neighbors to keep an eye on the forest and report any concerns to the appropriate contact person.

Access. Vandals are not likely to wander far from their vehicle. Place gates on access roads and prohibit recreational use of motorized vehicles on the property. Make sure there is ample parking near the access points and that the area is easily viewed from a main road.

Patrol. Create a partnership with neighbors, community watch programs, or local law enforcement to keep watch over the site. Consistent monitoring is likely to ward off vandalism.

Reporting. Should vandalism occur, immediately report it to authorities. Promptly reporting incidents and ensuring that the act is investigated and pursued sends a message that vandalism won't be tolerated.

Repair. Damage should be repaired as quickly as possible. This demonstrates that the site is used and maintained and that vandalism won't discourage school forest efforts. If possible and appropriate, involve the person responsible for the damage in the repair.

Material Selection. Selecting materials that are difficult to vandalize, easy to repair, or inexpensive to replace are the best choice for signage. Materials such as stone, wood composites, metal (steel, aluminum, bronze), fiberglass, and high-pressure laminates are very durable and can resist many types of vandalism.

References:

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