



# Wisconsin School Forest Education Plan Template



School forests are incredible education resources. So often educators recognize the uniqueness of having a school forest but struggle to understand how to use it with students. Having a written education or foundational plan for your school forest is a crucial step in developing your forest program. The school forest education plan will act as a foundational plan that the rest of your program will be built upon. The plan will provide clear direction for development and sustenance of the school forest program.

Many school forests have thrived over the years, continuing to be a place of effective educational programming for students in their district. Other school forests show a short burst of energy and then flicker out. What is the difference? One of the main factors to ensure longevity of an effective school forest program is having a solid foundation for how the district will use the school forest property. Too often 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 those connections.

Start thinking now about whether the district values using the school forest as an outdoor classroom, how the district should manage the forest's natural resources, how classroom curriculum connects to the school forest, and what needs to be put in place to help the forest thrive in the future. All of those thoughts go into developing an educational plan for your school forest property that will start you on the path to success.

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

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

A sample education plan and a needs assessment are also available. You can access these documents on-line at: <https://www.uwsp.edu/cnr-ap/leaf/school-forests/Pages/School-Forest-Education-Plans.aspx>.

Planning is a great start. Don't forget to implement and modify the plan as the school forest program matures! This should be a fluid document. Don't put it on a shelf and forget about it. Use it as a working document to reference often and update as changes are made to your school forest program.

If you have any questions about foundational planning for school forest programs, please contact the Wisconsin School Forest Education Specialist with the LEAF program at: 715-346-2633 or [Gretchen.Marshall@uwsp.edu](mailto:Gretchen.Marshall@uwsp.edu)



LEAF-Wisconsin's K-12 Forestry Education Program  
College of Natural Resources  
**University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point**



## SECTION 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 and how students will benefit from using the school forest as an extension of the indoor classroom.*

### *Have you done a Needs Assessment?*

What do your teaching staff, administrators, students, and community members think about the school forest? Have you asked? A simple survey, asking about the district's school forest needs, will help identify the direction your education plan should go. The needs assessment results provide the basis for developing the school forest program. Gather information from staff (teachers, support personnel, administrators) and community members:

- 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: <https://www.uwsp.edu/cnr-ap/leaf/school-forests/Pages/School-Forest-Education-Plans.aspx>. Choose the School Forest Needs Assessment hyperlink.

### **A. Value statement**

The value statement describes why outdoor environmental education (EE) and the school forest are important to your school district. Why does the district value the school forest, as an outdoor classroom, a key learning environment? Incorporate 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. You can also include a mission statement in this section. If you have done a needs assessment, include results which support the value and desires of staff in the district.

***List your thoughts and ideas for this section below.....***



## SECTION 2. SITE DESCRIPTION AND OPPORTUNITIES

*In this section the physical school forest property(s) will be described. It includes the site description and location, site history, and site management goals.*

### A. 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/number of acres
- 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

***List your thoughts and ideas for this sub-section below.....***

### B. Site management

Educational goals should drive the management of the school forest. Include the objectives and recommendations for management that should take place at the school forest to maintain the health of the forest. Indicate how management activities will be used to educate students.

***List your thoughts and ideas for this sub-section below.....***

#### ***\*Site history***

***This subsection is not required, but highly recommended.*** 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. You may need to dig through your community's resources in the library, courthouse, and historical society. This can be expanded as the program is developed – it is a great opportunity to get students involved. Include both:

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

***List your thoughts and ideas for this sub-section below.....***



## Section 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. Consider this section a scope and sequence or curriculum map.*

### A. Educational goals

What are your goals for utilizing the school forest as a learning space for students?

### B. 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), subjects, and concepts are covered. This will essentially take the form of a scope and sequence. *Example: Sixth grade, Math, measurement/unit conversion, Students will be able to...Measure and graph the diameter of trees in the pine plantation.*

### C. Alignment with state standards

Align the curriculum with appropriate Wisconsin, Core, and NGSS standards.

### D. Resources

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

*List your thoughts and ideas for these sub-sections below.....*

### E. Staff development

How will you continuously inform and train staff members, so they feel confident and comfortable using the school forest as a learning environment? 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, format, location (best if at school forest), time, and who will facilitate (name or organization).

*List your thoughts and ideas for this sub-section below.....*

### F. Assessment

Determine how the success of the school forest program will be assessed. e.g., # of students utilizing the school forest, specific student learning, portfolio additions, etc.

*List your thoughts and ideas for this sub-section below.....*



## Section 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 continuity in-case of staffing or funding changes.*

### A. School forest committee & its responsibilities

Who should be on your team? 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.

***List your thoughts and ideas for this sub-section below.....***

### B. Communication Plan

Develop a strategy for how the value, needs, and successes will be shared both internally and externally with teachers, administrators, and the community to build support for the school forest program.

***List your thoughts and ideas for this sub-section below.....***

### C. Long-range Goals and an Implementation Plan

List long-range goals for the school forest program. Think about all of the logistical components that are needed to make the forest thrive as a learning environment for years to come. Do you need to establish a school forest advisory committee? Are there facility issues that need to be addressed? Are there accessibility issues that make the forest hard to get to? Is money available to transport students to the forest? 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: building a school forest lodge; short-term goal: drafting school forest curriculum.

Develop a plan, including a timeline, to implement the education plan, long range goals, and other components identified in your long-range vision. Include key activities and resources (human and/or financial) needed to implement specific components. List your goals, a timeline for accomplishment, the resources (what and/or who), and how to successfully accomplish the goal.

***List your thoughts and ideas for this sub-section below.....***

#### *\*District commitment*

**This subsection is not required, but highly recommended.** Obtain district commitment of the school forest program via school board adoption of the school forest education plan.