

Wisconsin Woodlands



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Creating Tomorrow's Woodlands Today

The birth of school forests

Make the time to visit a school forest near you

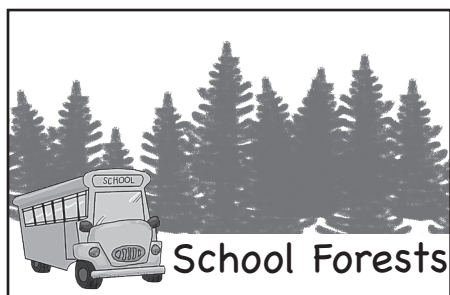
By Stephen Schmidt & Gretchen Marshall

When was the last time, if ever, you visited a school forest? WWOA is partnering with LEAF, Wisconsin's K-12 Forestry Education Program, to spotlight school forests in each of the next several issues of *Wisconsin Woodlands*. Featured school forests will have active forest management plans, be 40 acres or more in size with unique natural or historical features, and be open to the public for visits.

Wisconsin has a long and proud school forest tradition, owing its roots, in part, to an idea that came overseas from Australia in 1925. Dr. H.L. Russell, then dean of the College of Agriculture at UW-Madison, was inspired by Australian students who planted trees on public lands as a school project. At the same time, Wakelin "Ranger Mac" McNeel, a 4-H leader, worked with students and teachers to replant

trees across the state. These two inspired legislation that created the Wisconsin Community Forest Law in 1927.

Under this law, the first school forests in the United States were



registered in 1928 in Forest County, Wisconsin, at Laona, Wabeno and Crandon. School forests began as an excellent way to replant trees while providing outdoor education to students and a source of income for schools. Today, school forests have evolved into wonderful outdoor classrooms where students learn about the local ecosystem while engaging in lessons that span across the curriculum from math to social studies to foreign language and art.

Officially, a school forest is land owned or controlled by a public school district, which is registered under the Community Forest Law and used for environmental education and natural resource management.

School forest programs are as diverse as the species that inhabit them. Consider a visit to one of the featured school forests in your WWOA chapter or another one around the state. These gems are waiting to be explored!

You can learn more about Wisconsin's School Forests by clicking on the school forest tab at www.leafprogram.org, or by calling Wisconsin School Forest Education Specialist Gretchen Marshall at 715-346-2633.

Wisconsin's statewide school forest program is coordinated by LEAF, Wisconsin's K-12 Forestry Education Program, as the result of a partnership between the Wisconsin



Students at the Hovind Family School Forest get a history lesson about logging during the school forest's dedication.

By the numbers

- There are 425 registered school forest parcels.
- 234 are in public school districts, six in private schools and seven in higher education institutions.
- School forests total more than 28,000 acres, ranging in size from 1 acre to 748 acres.
- The largest total area registered by a single district is 1,211 acres in Rhinelander (9 parcels).
- About 30 percent are less than 40 acres, while 50 percent are 40-100 acres and 15 percent are more than 100 acres.
- School forests are located in 68 of Wisconsin's 72 counties.

DNR's forestry division and the Wisconsin Center for Environmental Education in the College of Natural Resources at UW-Stevens Point.





Photos: LEAF - Wisconsin's K-12 Forestry Education Program

Students draw in the Wabeno School Forest. Today many subjects are taught in the state's 425 registered school forest parcels.

The first school forests

Laona, Crandon & Wabeno

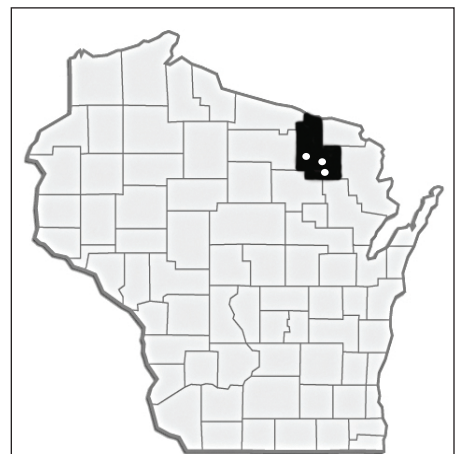
By **Stephen Schmidt** and
Gretchen Marshall

Forested land in Wisconsin in the early 1900s was scarce compared to the early 21st century. Poor planning, lack of science, rampant forest fires and erosion of forest soils in failed attempts at agriculture fed the dreams of several visionaries who knew we needed to replant our forests. From the ashes of forest fires and washed away topsoil, the ideas of contemporaries Dr. H.L. Russell and Wakelin "Ranger Mac" McNeel took root as school children in Laona, Crandon and Wabeno planted tens of thousands of trees. These

school districts each received a parcel of land in 1928 dedicated as the first school forests in the United States. Today, those forests are managed for natural resources and student learning. Their proximity makes it possible to visit and hike all three in the same day. Feel free to visit them anytime during daylight hours.

Laona School Forest

A state historical sign marks the first school forest in the United States just south of Laona on Highway 32. The 80-acre school forest is experiencing a revival of activity led by Principal Jim Bradley and the school forest commit-



**Forest County
School Forests**



Photos: LEAF - Wisconsin's K-12 Forestry Education Program

Left: A first-grade class observes a timber harvest in the Laona School Forest. Right: High school students replant trees on the same land two years after a harvest at the Laona School Forest.

tee comprised of teachers, community leaders and local business leaders. Just beyond the trailhead, a new amphitheater is being constructed in the pines for students to gather and prepare for their jaunts into the woods. Heading downhill and east past the theater, the mile-long trail loop meanders first through a mix of river bottom spruce, cedar and birch, crossing Swanson's Creek over two cedar bridges. Work is planned for this part of the trail and to shore up the bridges originally built by the Wisconsin Conservation Corps.

A ridge between the bridges provides a bird's eye view of the Class 2 trout stream and the forest canopy on either side of the trail. Students planted free seedlings from the state nursery program after a recent harvest on the north side of the property. Access to those seedlings is one of the benefits to school forest certification. Laona School Forest is an ideal outdoor classroom, with its variety of features and ample opportunities for students to take part in active management.

- *Access:* Less than a mile south of Laona on the east side of Highway 32. Look for the state historical marker with parking at the trailhead.

- *Contact:* Jim Bradley, jbradley@laona.k12.wi.us; 715-674-2143

Crandon & Hovind Family Forests

Although the original 10-acre school forest was sold, Crandon School District has three parcels, including one at the K-12 school and two at the well-used Hovind Family School Forest. Now deceased WWOA members Ralph and Mildred Hovind donated two 40-acre parcels, one each in 2005 and 2013. Much of the forest sits atop a glacial ridge in a series of striations scoured by glaciers from northeast to southwest and easily seen in satellite imagery. Several mixed stands of hardwoods are due for selection harvest in 2019. Trail markers were removed to prepare for the harvest and the land will be remarked afterward.

The Hovind's wishes for the property were to provide educational opportunities for students, staff and community, maintain some of the forest as a "natural area" and maintain a healthy and vigorous forest through active management. School Forest Coordinator Cindy Edlund and the school forest committee are keeping these requests in mind — high school students have learned

how to assess the timber for harvest. When the harvest occurs, the logger will leave 1 acre unharvested adjacent to the cut area for comparison

- *Access:* Three miles west of Crandon on the north side at 10974 Highway 8, Town of Crandon. Upon entering the gravel drive, turn east and head to the top of the ridge to the school forest sign where the main trailhead, shelter and restrooms are located.
- *Contact:* Cindy Edlund, dr.cedlund@gmail.com; 715-478-3339

Wabeno School Forest

The Wabeno School Forest is a maple/basswood forest on a glacial drumlin; there is also a small stand of pines on the property that was planted by students some 50 years ago. John Twardowski shared that there is a wide variety of flora and fauna typical to northern Wisconsin and very few invasive species. White-tailed deer, turkey and grouse inhabit the woodland and spring ephemerals cover the forest floor. There is a maintained restroom facility and a couple of small openings for outdoor classroom activities.

- *Access:* Head south from Wabeno about 1 mile on Highway 32. The forest access point is on the east side

For more info

Learn more about the history of these school forests:

- The School Forest page of the Madison Metropolitan School District: www.madison.k12.wi.us
- The Forest County Spy, Crandon Library blog: <http://www.crandon-pl.org/history/the-school-forests/>

of 32 and is marked by a sign. Drive 0.5 miles on the gravel road and you will see a second sign and restroom on the trailhead on the north side of the road.

- **Contact:** John Twardowski, jtwardowski@wabeno.k12.wi.us; 715-473-5122

Visit these forests or volunteer

A visit to these forests may inspire ideas and a spirit to get involved. Don't hesitate to contact these schools to volunteer.



Schmidt

Stephen Schmidt is a state-certified science educator and adjunct science instructor at Northcentral Technical College who also manages the Rudolph

Environmental Center School Forest for Newman Catholic Schools. He is also an educational outreach specialist for LEAF.



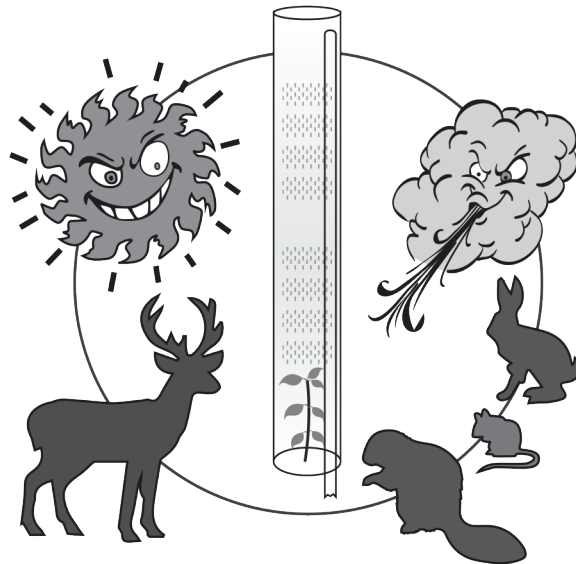
Marshall

Gretchen Marshall is a forestry and outdoor education specialist at UW-Stevens Point. She taught high school biology in Black River Falls and helped develop the school forest

program there before joining the LEAF program.

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