

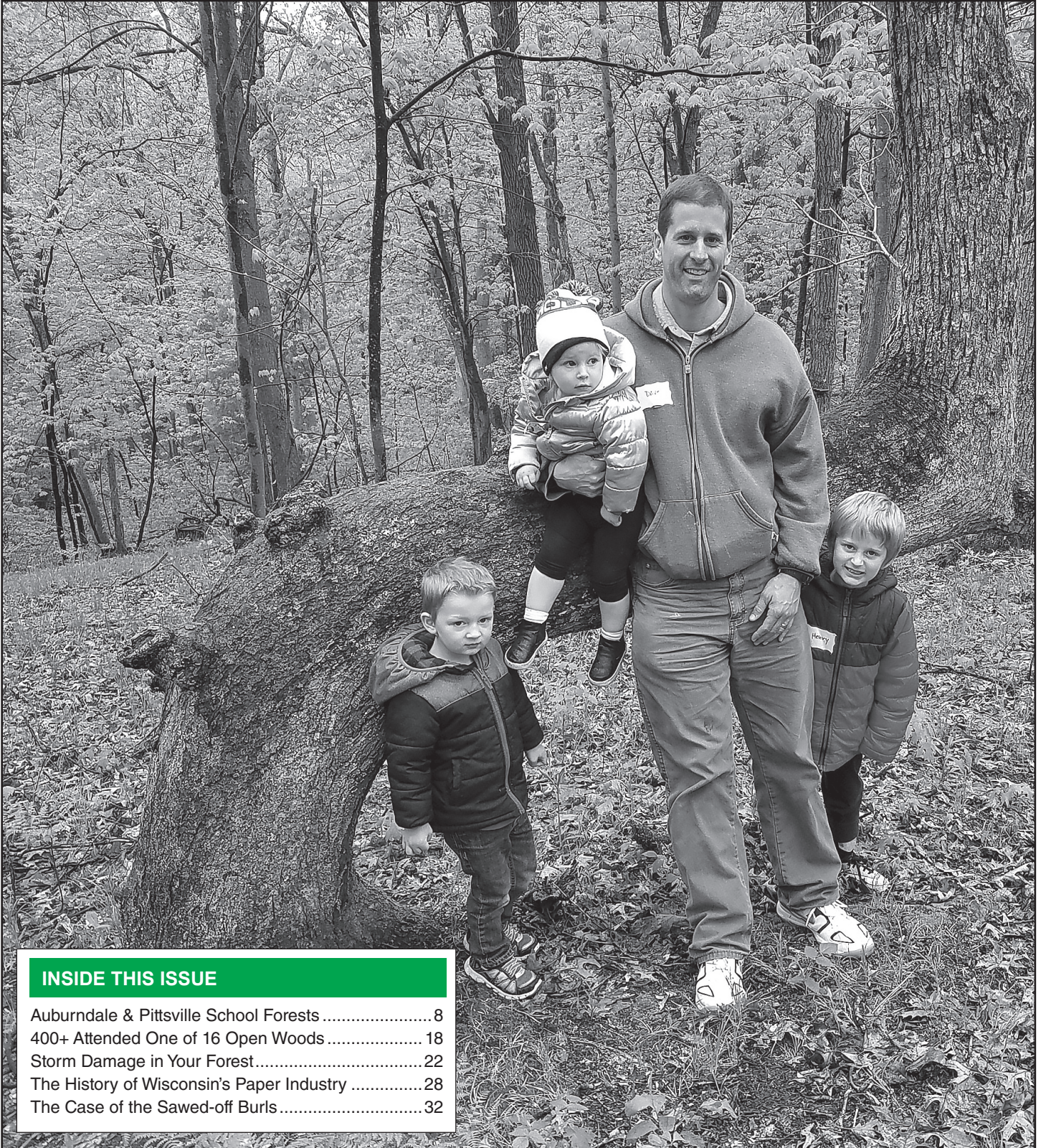
# Wisconsin



# Woodlands

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## INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Auburndale & Pittsville School Forests .....	8
400+ Attended One of 16 Open Woods .....	18
Storm Damage in Your Forest .....	22
The History of Wisconsin's Paper Industry .....	28
The Case of the Sawed-off Burls .....	32

*Creating Tomorrow's Woodlands Today*

# Auburndale & Pittsville grow great school forest programs

By Stephen Schmidt

Properties become school forests through a number of different routes, most often donated or bequeathed to school districts by a visionary who wants his or her beloved land to offer more to the world than development.

Distance from the schools to the forest is often the most important limiting factor to how much student use the forest actually sees. Auburndale School District solved this dilemma by selling a distant property 20 miles away to purchase their current school forest in 2016 that it is within reasonable walking distance from both the elementary and middle-high school campuses.

Since then, outdoor learning at the Auburndale School Forest has gone through the canopy, led by high school agricultural science teacher, Mark Cournoyer, and a very supportive community.

Hands-on learning opportunities have been given to the students and they have been up to the challenges. For example, students:

- Built a 40-foot by 60-foot shelter from concrete to finishing and assisted with the 40-foot by 40-foot classroom including WiFi, plumbing, heat and power.
- Tap about 160 maple trees and process 1,000 or more gallons of sap for their annual pancake feed in March.
- Participate in the WI DNR's Snapshot Wisconsin citizen science program.
- Typically visit the school forest about four times per year, with some high school students visiting much more.

Students of all physical abilities are able to access most of the forest, including in wheelchairs from a modified UTV.

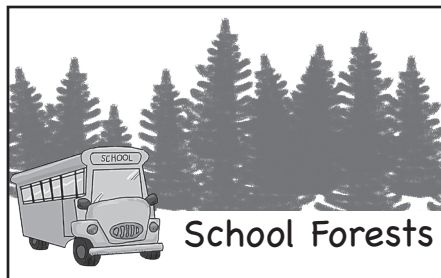
Plans for further development and use by the community include a disk golf course, cross country meets, summer school classes, and civic organization meetings.

Auburndale School Forest is bound-



Photo by Mark Cournoyer

**Students prepare to gather sap at the Auburndale School Forest, which is visited by students about four times each year.**



ed by farm fields on three sides and a residential area to the south with the high school campus diagonal to the southeast corner of the property. Mixed hardwoods with some sporadic pockets of conifers comprise 32 of the 40 acres. The remaining 8 acres is open fields with food plots to attract wildlife. Plans for improvement of habitat diversity are in the works with the Wisconsin Wetlands Association to implement a wetland scrape in the next couple of years. Some waterfowl nest in cavity houses on the property already, but after the scrape they will find more places to rest after feeding in

local fields and students should be able to observe more wildlife.

The public is welcome to visit the school forest. If you are coming from some distance, it may be a good idea to call ahead or email in case there is a school group using the property.

*Directions:* Approach from First Street and turn north onto Park Avenue. The building with parking is at the end of Park Avenue. Trail access is on the north side of the building.

## Pittsville School Forest

Unlike Auburndale's newly purchased school forest, the road to Pittsville's property becoming a registered school forest is a long and winding journey. Property ownership of the parcel of land comprising the Pittsville school forest can be connected to the war of 1812. Todd Steward, Pittsville High School biology teacher shared the following from the 2010 Pittsville School Forest Education Plan:



Photo by Todd Steward

**Pittsville High School students build a primitive shelter for a survival assignment at their school forest.**

As documented by the United States Department of the Interior, the present Pittsville School Forest land was part of 140 acres assigned to Martha Vernon, widow of Elisha Bentley, private in Captain Buford's Company, Virginia Militia, War of 1812.

Transfer of the property from Martha Vernon to William H. Sampson and the patent recorded the 1st day of July, 1862, by the United States General Land Office, Abraham Lincoln, President.

The land changed hands through the years from Sampson to Hadley, to Owen Brady, to Robert McComb, to Kert Creek Drainage and to Wood County in 1930. It has remained in county ownership since 1930 with Babcock School District as grantee from 1945 to 1962 and Pittsville School District as grantee since May 27, 1963.

A bottomland hardwood forest located along the Yellow River comprises about 80 acres of this 140-acre tract of land, with much of the remaining as an upland red pine plantation. Various sized harvests, including 92,000 board feet of hardwoods in 1958, have been completed since those early years. Students planted 1,000 or more red pines each year from 1958-60. Careful management of the forest, especially the floodplain areas that have rich,

loamy sands, have kept the diverse, valuable hardwoods healthy for current and future generations to visit. Timber management activities also consider the two Wisconsin listed threatened species: Blanding's turtle (*Emydoidea blandingii*) and wood turtle (*Glyptemys insculpta*), found in the river corridor and associated wetlands. A pond was constructed in 1966, primarily for students to study aquatic plant life and to prevent ice from moving onto Highway 80 when the Yellow River periodically jammed. It has also been used for fishing and ice skating. In addition to the pond, a sizable backwater slough adds up to comprise about 10 acres of the property.



More recent developments have made the property accessible and usable as an outdoor classroom. A 2009 timber sale led to the lengthening and widening of the driveway that was also partially graveled for buses to have easier access. In 2013-14, a shelter was built by students in the building and construction class, led by teacher Stephen Hadfield, a 2013 LEAF School Forest Award winner. Timber harvested from the school forest was used in an ancient technique of timber framing, in which wood pegs are used in conjunction with mortise and tenon joining

techniques. Elementary, middle and high school students visit the Pittsville School Forest each year for a wide variety of activities such as snowshoeing, aquatic and terrestrial ecology studies, species identification and orienteering. Biology students learn survival skills by completing challenges such as shelter building, water purification and fire starting with minimal supplies.

## Auburndale School Forest Facts

- Certified in 2015
- Total acres: 40
- Student visits: > 3,000 annually
- Auburndale School Forest is on Facebook @auburndaleschool-forest
- Contact: Mark Cournoyer, agriculture science teacher, mcournoyer@aubschools.com

## Pittsville School Forest Facts

- Certified in 1945 to Babcock School District, which became part of Pittsville Schools and was recertified in 1966
- Total acres: 140
- School district enrollment: 575 students (2018-19)
- Student visits: 500-1,800 annually
- District Facebook page for school forest pictures: @PittsvilleWISD
- Contact: Todd Steward, science teacher, stewatod@pittsville.k12.wi.us

techniques.

Directions: Pittsville School Forest is 10 miles south of Pittsville on the west side of Highway 80. Look for the sign just north of the driveway.

*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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