

SCHOOL FOREST PROGRAM BENEFITS AND CRITERIA

The Minnesota School Forest Program is governed by Minnesota Statute 89.41. To view the statute, visit www.leg.state.mn.us. The purpose of the School Forest Criteria is to identify the responsibilities of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the School District or public education agency (school). The criteria will help strengthen the program by ensuring that lands are used in a manner consistent with program goals and sites and educational activities are supported appropriately.

Program Benefits and DNR Responsibilities

The Minnesota School Forest Program provides a valuable natural resource education experience. The DNR values the knowledge students gain from experiencing outdoor education activities. To support and promote school participation in outdoor and natural resource activities, the Division of Forestry Minnesota School Forest Program will provide the following benefits to school forest sites:

- **Support Mailings** – Mailings will be sent to site coordinators two to three times each school year containing information to support and expand activities in school forests.
- **Foresters** - DNR regional and area foresters are available to help schools identify, plan, and implement school forest activities.
- **Staff** – The DNR’s Minnesota School Forest Program Manager and staff will support sites in a variety of ways, such as: grant writing, curriculum development, educational materials distribution, connections to DNR programs, support on legal issues, site visits, etc.

- **Education Materials** - The School Forest Program is run in conjunction with Project Learning Tree and all other forestry education programs, providing sites special access to forestry education resources and development of specific school forest materials.
- **Web Site** - The School Forest Web site provides program materials to support School Forest sites. www.mndnr.gov/schoolforest
- **Stewardship Plans** – A DNR forester will work with each site to write a school forest Stewardship Plan, free of charge. A copy of the current School Forest Stewardship Plan will be kept at the DNR School Forest office.
- **DNR Support** - Members of other DNR divisions (wildlife, ecological resources, etc.) provide support for special projects.
- **Forestry Education Updates** - Site coordinators receive monthly e-mails with information on grants, time-sensitive development opportunities, trainings, and news from the School Forest Program.



Teacher training at St. Therese School Forest.

MN DNR

- **“How to Teach in Your School Forest” Workshop** - The DNR will provide a free, site-specific workshop on working with students outdoors, classroom management on the trail, activities to conduct in a School Forest, connections to the indoor classroom, and appropriate topics to address in a School Forest.
- **Grant Opportunities** – The School Forest Program staff will work to find grant funding or partner support to offset costs for school activities.
- **Conference** – Every other year the School Forest Program hosts a School Forest conference or workshop to bring together site coordinators, teachers, administrators, and volunteers from sites statewide to learn about new program happenings, explore educational opportunities, and discuss current issues and needs. The conferences are free and substitute teacher stipends are typically provided
- **Committee and Site Coordinator** – A School Forest Committee consisting of site teachers, administrators, parents, volunteers, community members, or students will operate to guide the development and use of the site. A site coordinator/chair will be designated to be the site’s main contact and guide the work of the School Forest Committee and site activities. The site coordinator is responsible for communication with the Minnesota School Forest Program Manager.
- **Funding** – Sufficient funding to support school forest site activities will be provided. Funding for transportation, site maintenance, and teaching supplies will be considered. If necessary, a plan for revenue generated from the site will be created.
- **Stewardship Plan** – A School Forest Stewardship Plan will be developed and updated to ensure sustainable forest management and continuation of education activities. If harvesting occurs, the school will follow Minnesota Forest Resources Council timber harvesting guidelines (www.frc.statemn.us).

School Responsibilities

The Minnesota School Forest Program seeks schools that are interested in a long-term commitment to natural resource and outdoor education. Participation from multiple teachers, administrators, parents, and community members is vital to the success of a site program. To help ensure a lasting, beneficial School Forest site effort, the following school criteria exist:

- **Educational Activities** – A site will complete a minimum of five (5) educational activities every year. These activities can be conducted by the school, after school programs, or community partners (e.g., scouts, youth groups).
- **Annual Report** – The site coordinator will submit an annual report to the Minnesota School Forest Program Manager no later than June 30 each year.
- **Outdoor Classroom** – Any sites consisting of tax-forfeited land will maintain the agreement to use the land only as an outdoor classroom.
- **Land Ownership** – Any site not owned by the school must have a written agreement between the school and landowner indicating the conditions of use and designating the site as a School Forest.



Accountability

The previously mentioned criteria exist to ensure that appropriate activities happen on school forest lands. If the criteria are not followed, the Minnesota School Forest Program Manager and local DNR foresters will work with site leaders to identify and agree upon a plan and timeline to bring the site into compliance with the criteria. If a site is unable or unwilling to follow the criteria, the site will lose program benefits and certification in the School Forest Program. If a noncompliant School Forest is on tax-forfeited land, the appropriate county authority will be notified of the site's removal from the program. Reconveyance of land will be handled between the site/school and the county.

Site leaders can address comments or concerns about the program to the Minnesota School Forest Program Manager. If the DNR does not comply with the previously mentioned criteria, site leaders can appeal to the State Forester or the DNR Commissioner.



Students study birds at Five Hawks School Forest.

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