

Middleton-Cross Plains Area School Forest

Past: The Middleton Cross Plains Area School Forest has provided hands-on, relevant, place-based learning opportunities for the students at Park Elementary School for 40 years. These opportunities in an outdoor setting create environmentally literate students by raising their awareness, knowledge and shifting their individual attitudes towards the environment and its challenges. The Middleton Cross Plains Area School Forest is located behind Park Elementary School in Cross Plains, WI. The trail was originally developed in the early 1970's. It begins with a ½ acre of restored prairie that leads into an 8 acre open oak woodland. Some of the plant species found include bloodroot, mayapple, shooting star, jack in the pulpit, columbine, morels, wild geranium, hackberry, oak, hickory, black walnut and trillium. Animal species found in the school forest include red fox, deer, bluebirds, red tanager, American toads, wood frogs, and garter snakes. The school forest trail switchbacks up a glacial bluff and ends at a remnant prairie-species include bergamot, hoary puccoon, columbine and big bluestem grasses. From the top of this remnant prairie you have an amazing aerial view of Cross Plains. The hike takes about 45 minutes round trip with kids. The Middleton Cross Plains Area School Forest is open to the general public year round! Please help yourself to a map at the trailhead and take the hike to the top! The view is absolutely worth the trip!

Present: 2000-2016 The Middleton Cross Plains Area School Forest officially became designated a school forest by the State of Wisconsin in 2008. Since 2000, the school forest has provided opportunities for our school district to strengthen community relations with the CP Lions Club, the CP Girl Scouts, the CP Boy Scouts, the Swamplovers, Girls on the Run and many other community organizations. The School Forest has received funding from the following organizations to support teaching and learning in the MCPA School Forest:

- **Besadny funds** to upgrade and maintain trails, add new signage, print maps
- **The Graham Martin Foundation** to plant native flowers and grasses in the Rain Garden and prairie
- **The Wisconsin Environmental Education Board** to develop an educational plan for the forest
- **The Wisconsin Environmental Education Board** to purchase resources, materials and fund meeting time to implement the educational plan for the school forest. Our site has had partnerships with Plastic Ingenuity-4,000 square foot rain garden, UW Arboretum-Earth Partnership for Schools -site visits, and the WI DNR-Pilot site for a new Natural Heritage Certification.



Future: (2016 and beyond) Developing a sustainable maintenance plan that would continue our connections with interested Cross Plains community groups. Burn (with the assistance of the CP Fire Department) the lower prairie, recently restored lower land area, and the rain garden to encourage native plant growth. Continue to remove invasive species: buckthorn, sumac, reed canary grass, etc. Add more habitat and plant features to support native animal and plant species through hands-on student projects. Develop new student designed maps of the outdoor school site. Add a third seating area using flat stones at the edge of the woods. Develop another outdoor learning area on site using a \$2500.00 a MCPASD Education Grant. Offer more school forest tours and workshops for the MCPASD community to use the school forest as a resource for students, staff, families, and the MCPASD community.