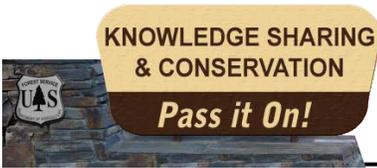




United States Department of Agriculture
Forest Service



Urban Teachers Initiative: Bringing Forests to the City

Intent of Use: To provide professional development training focused on forest-related education and FS activities to educators from urban areas.

Applicability: FS employees in or near urban areas

Key Words: teachers, education, outreach, urban, fieldwork, collaboration, environmental stewardship, partnerships

Description of Practice: The 'Urban Teachers Initiative: Bringing Forests to the City' refers to work done under the Urban Connection Program, whose goal is to help connect urban populations to the natural environment through outreach, education and exposure to National Forest and Grasslands. In partnership with the Environmental Education & Urban Teacher Initiative, the Detroit-based Urban Connection initiative targets educators for professional development.

The FS began Urban Connections in response to the increasing number of people in the U.S. who reside in urban areas and potentially have limited knowledge of the Forest Service or environmental stewardship in general. Teachers from urban areas have limited access to nature and are located at a distance from FS lands. Limited time and resources constrain these urban districts from providing this experience to their teachers or students. Each workshop events occur at a nearby urban forest that is accessible to the targeted urban school districts.

This professional development uniquely emphasizes the use of local resources to create an experience in nature. The program focuses on fostering a sense of the natural world in accessible environments so that the students may discover nature in their own surroundings, and understand how the issues affecting their local area are similar to those experienced in National Forests. A broad coalition of partners, including several environmental non-profits, Michigan Technological University, the Michigan Alliance for Environmental & Outdoor Education (MAEOE), and the FS, support this program in the nearby Belle Isle Park in Detroit. After a successful pilot in 2011, a new two-year project will collaborate with twenty Detroit middle and high school teachers each of the two years to provide professional development focused on forest ecology, management and stewardship. The initial initiative was supported by a FS grant through the Urban Connections program and now is being funded with a grant from FS State and Private Forestry. Both of the grants required a 1:1 cost share, so MAEOE board members have been contributing their time to plan and conduct the Initiative and all of the workshops, and workshop facility space is donated.

The programming of this initiative is based on each group of twenty teachers will attend three workshops during the school year, followed by a five-day 'summer teacher institute'. Topics covered are tree identification, invasive species education, classroom forestry lessons, and project planning and implementation. Foresters, ecologists, wetland and soil scientists, invasive plant specialists, and environmental educators provide support to the programming and promote the designing and implementation of stewardship projects, community workdays, and outreach events. Following these teacher trainings, the teachers are encouraged to utilize what they learned to involve their students, by conducting nature-based lessons or organizing field trips

focused on shoreline restoration, trail construction and invasive species control in the forests on the nearby park, Belle Isle.

Critical Success Factors:

- **Partnerships.** Partnerships with environmental education non-profits and school districts allow the Forest Service to reach out to and educate adults and children alike.
 - **Collaboration.** The teachers take personal time to participate and work with their schools to better accommodate the needs of applying the curriculum on an individual basis and also to engage the students in similar activities during class time.
 - **Resources.** Grants have supported initiative from the beginning and the continued contribution of the Forest Service and MAEOE make it possible.
- Listening.** Modifying the curriculum for the workshops should be flexible in order to address challenges that affect the teachers' ability to use this knowledge, for example the adaptability of the lessons so that the knowledge can be applied to nearby locations instead of National Forests and also accommodating the schedule, materials and content so that teachers can attend without undue burden personally or on the district.

Benefits:

- Supplies teachers with new knowledge and that they may apply in the classroom to educate students on forests, wildlife, and the environment.
- Provides students the opportunity to learn about nature in the classroom or through field-trips

Ideas for Wider Use: This teacher education initiative can be applied to all regions of the Forest Service that deal with outreach and education, whether it is directed toward students or the community in general. Additionally, providing FS exposure to teachers and students can expand the potential for the FS to impact forest and environmental education.

Costs:

The 2011 initiative was funded by a \$14,000 grant from the U.S. Forest Service for the 2010-11 school year. Additional \$80,000 grant was received to continue the program from FS State and Private Forestry. The cost of time and expertise is voluntary participation of individuals associated with the projects. In the upcoming workshops and classes, teachers will receive classroom and field supplies and a field-trip budget.

Website:

The Urban Connections website:

<http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/r9/workingtogether/?cid=stelprdb5207958>

A success story for the 2011 program, 'Forest Service partners with Detroit Environmental Education for Urban Teachers Initiative':

<http://www.fs.fed.us/r9/ssrs/story?id=5854>

Information on the 2012 program:

http://www.sfi.mtu.edu/Urban_teachers/index.html

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