



A Forest for Every Classroom: Learning to Make Choices for the Future

An Educational Initiative Emphasizing Resource Stewardship, Citizenship and Civic Engagement at Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park

Inspired by a common vision of students learning from and caring for public lands, Shelburne Farms, the Conservation Study Institute, Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park, Green Mountain National Forest, and the Northeast Office of the National Wildlife Federation joined efforts to create *A Forest for Every Classroom*, a professional development program for educators on place-based education. Participating teachers develop curriculum that encourages student understanding, care and stewardship of the public lands in their communities. At the heart of the program is the belief that students who are immersed in the interdisciplinary study of “place” are more eager to learn and be involved in the stewardship of their communities and public lands.

Public Forums

To create a program that was responsive to local communities and the needs of teachers, the partners solicited input from community members, teachers, and forestry professionals on the concepts and experiences that students should have in a curriculum about forest stewardship. The public forums emphasized the importance of teacher-developed curriculum that integrates hands-on exploration of ecology, sense of place, stewardship, and civics.

Innovation... Through Collaboration

This partnership of public and private organizations modeled how collaboration can increase the effectiveness of organizations to serve communities, enhance educational outreach, and protect public lands. To assess the achievements of *A Forest for Every Classroom*, the partners sought an independent evaluation of the program’s first two years. The evaluation focused on the program’s effectiveness and its impact on teachers and teacher practices.

The evaluation reported that the strengths of the program include:

“Building connections between public lands, schools, and communities; offering diverse and balanced perspectives; developing a supportive network of resource professionals; and engaging students as stewards through service-learning.”

Offering Diverse and Balanced Perspectives

As part of its emphasis on citizenship the program works with teachers to enhance their comfort dealing with diverse perspectives on forest stewardship related issues. The program includes a panel discussion with participants representing a wide range of interests and opinions. The panelists are challenged to demonstrate civic dialogue so that all points of view are listened to and considered.

One teacher wrote in their evaluation:

"I think back about that panel a lot. I have so much more respect and empathy for different points of view since that panel discussion. Having that breadth there is so critical, so that we don't have preaching to the converted. And it also puts us in better touch with where our students are coming from."