

School Forest

CENTENNIAL CHALLENGE



HIKING ACTIVITIES

- ☐ Hike the Prairie Relic Trail: Observe Native prairie remnants and rolling terrain
- ☐ Explore Cliff Edge Trail along the elevated rocky ridges of the driftless area
- ☐ Walk through Jerome Jones Pine Plantation, planted decades ago by students and staff
- ☐ Trek the Wilderness Trail for a quiet deep-woods experience
- ☐ Follow Old Wagon Road, a historic doubletrack trail cutting through mature hardwoods
- ☐ Navigate the Oak Hill Trail to observe old-growth white and red oaks
- ☐ Complete the full MMSD Forest Loop connecting multiple internal singletrack trails
- ☐ Practice trail navigation using the primary map located at the School Forest Day Lot on Fritz Road
- ☐ Compare topography between the glaciated regions of Dane County and unglaciated driftless terrain of the School Forest
- ☐ Take a photo of your shoes in the School Forest after your hike is completed!

www.mscr.org/programs/outdoors/school-forest/

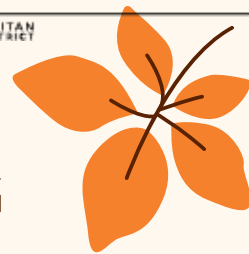


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WILDLIFE & BIRD WATCHING



- ☐ Spot nest songbirds: over 40 species nest in the forest during spring and summer
- ☐ Listen for red-headed woodpeckers hammering on dead oak snags
- ☐ Look for wild turkeys foraging along the forest floor and pine needle beds
- ☐ Scan the canopy for migratory birds during the Fall season
- ☐ Search for white-tailed deer grazing in the early morning or near dusk
- ☐ Track animal footprints in mud, soft soil, or the sandy forest floor from sandstone
- ☐ Identify roosting owls such as Barred or Great Horned owls by their calls at twilight
- ☐ Listen for red foxes or coyotes traversing the quiet boundary edges especially in the evenings
- ☐ Spot tree squirrels and chipmunks gathering acorns in the Fall
- ☐ Look for red tailed hawks soaring above the open field sections



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BOTANY & PLANT ID



- ☐ Identify native White Oaks and Red Oaks throughout the Olson Oak Woods
- ☐ Look for Shagbark Hickory Trees with their distinct peeling bark
- ☐ Search for ephemerals like bloodroot, trillium, and dutchman's beeches in April/May
- ☐ Identify invasive buckthorn and garlic mustard to understand forest restoration needs
- ☐ Identify white pine needles (bundles of 5) from red pine needles in the Jerome Jones Pine Plantation
- ☐ Observe ferns thriving in the shaded, moist understory ravines
- ☐ Identify wild fungi and mushrooms on decaying oak logs (look, don't touch!)
- ☐ Study mosses and lichens growing on ancient driftless rock outcrops
- ☐ Identify native prairie grasses like Big Bluestem and Indian Grass in open field areas
- ☐ Learn to spot poison ivy along trail margins (leaves of 3, let it be!)

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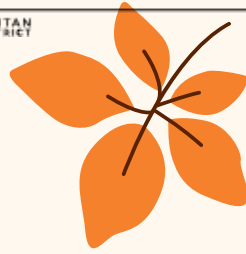


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FALL ACTIVITIES



- ☐ Hike through vivid autumn colors as white oaks turn deep burgundy and red oaks transform to amber
- ☐ Crunch through deep leaf piles along the Old Wagon Road and ridge singletracks
- ☐ Collect fall acorns and hickory nuts to inspect the seed hulls
- ☐ Spot migrating raptors passing over the canopy during the peak autumn migration corridor
- ☐ Look for fall fungi species like Puffballs or Turkey Tail mushrooms on decaying wood
- ☐ Watch active squirrels and chipmunks caching nuts for winter survival in the oak stands
- ☐ Observe mature prairie grasses like Big Bluestem turn coppery bronze in late September
- ☐ Enjoy cool weather hiking without summer heat, humidity or mosquitos
- ☐ Try to capture low autumn sunlight casting long shadows through the pine plantation canopy
- ☐ Listen to the dry, rustling oak canopy as autumn winds sweep through the elevated ridges

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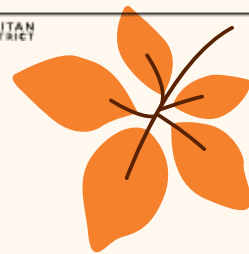
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PHOTOGRAPHY & ARTS



- ☐ Capture a photo of golden-hour sunlight where light filters through the pine canopy in the Jerome Jones Pine Plantation
- ☐ Take macro photos of delicate mosses, lichens, and wildflowers
- ☐ Photograph autumn foliage colors from the elevated oak ridge lookouts
- ☐ Sketch the historic forest landscapes or open air cabin structure you find
- ☐ Practice nature photography focusing on textures: rough bark, soft pine needles, weathered rocks, etc.
- ☐ Record the ambient forest soundscapes such as the wind in the leaves, bird calls, etc.
- ☐ Create a nature mandala with found items, laying them out in a symmetrical pattern then wiping them away and returning them to the woods
- ☐ Create leaf rubbing art using fallen leaves and paper during autumn
- ☐ Capture dramatic silhouette photos of mature oak trees against sunset skies
- ☐ Start a nature journal detailing weather, species spotted, and seasonal changes you see



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STEWARDSHIP & CONSERVATION



- ☐ Research the Friends of the School Forest to understand their connection
- ☐ Learn about prescribed burns used to maintain healthy oak savanna habitats
- ☐ Learn to identify invasive species such as garlic mustard and buckthorn
- ☐ Practice Leave No Trace (LNT) principles by leaving plants, rocks, and historical items untouched
- ☐ Pick up and pack out any stray litter found along public trail or access points
- ☐ Stay strictly on designated trails to protect delicate understory flora and prevent erosion
- ☐ Report trail damage or fallen trees to MSCR
- ☐ Research native communities that existed in the Unglaciaded Areas of Wisconsin
- ☐ Support public outdoor education spaces by researching land grants and how they support outdoor educational spaces
- ☐ Review all the rules of the state natural area and MMSD property listed on the kiosk at the Day Lot

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STEM/OUTDOOR EDUCATION



- ☐ Learn about ecosystem restoration and pre-settlement oak savannas then hike the School Forest to take note of management practices
- ☐ Study forest succession by contrasting the planted pine stand with the hardwood forest
- ☐ Examine soil profiles such as leaf litter, humus and mineral soil under the oak vs pine canopies
- ☐ Study the water cycle by observing runoff patterns down slope gradients after rain
- ☐ Investigate decomposition by examining fallen logs and decomposing leaf layers
- ☐ Learn survival skill basics like shelter-building concepts, knots, and fire building
- ☐ Examine tree rings on stumps to calculate tree age and historical weather conditions
- ☐ Study local geology and the boundaries of Wisconsin's unglaciated Driftless Area
- ☐ Learn basic map and compass skills navigation skills by orienteering
- ☐ Take an MSCR Outdoor Education Course to practice skills

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MINDFULNESS

- ☐ Practice Forest Bathing (Shinrin-yoku) by engaging all five senses in the quiet woods
- ☐ Find a bench or fallen log for outdoor meditation or silent contemplation
- ☐ Listen mindfully to the rustle of dry oak leaves in autumn breezes
- ☐ Practice deep breathing exercises taking in forest forest air
- ☐ Disconnect completely from digital devices for a few hours
- ☐ Observe the movement of clouds through canopy openings in the woods
- ☐ Feel the physical texture differences between rough oak bark and soft pine needles
- ☐ Watch sunlight patterns shift across the forest floor over an hour
- ☐ Enjoy the rhythmic sound of your own footsteps on packed dirt vs sandy soil
- ☐ Hike a trail you have never taken before and focus on seeing see items you've never noticed before



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YOUTH AND FAMILY ACTIVITIES

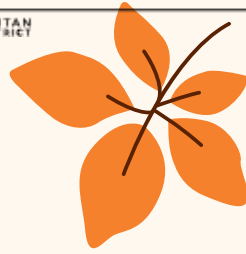


- ☐ Host a Nature Scavenger Hunt finding a feather, acorn, pinecone, and smooth rock
- ☐ Complete the MSCR Centennial Forest Challenge by logging 100 hours in nature
- ☐ Participate in an MSCR program at the School Forest
- ☐ Build small twig fairy houses or temporary natural sculptures near trail edges then dismantle
- ☐ Play 'I Spy' based on colors, shapes, and textures found along the path
- ☐ Count how many different bird songs you can distinguish in 10 minutes
- ☐ Look for insect galls on oak leaves and stems
- ☐ Teach Leave No Trace principles by packing out trash and collecting any you find
- ☐ Enjoy a rustic outdoor picnic at the open air shelter on Old Wagon Trail
- ☐ Ask your MMSD teacher to schedule a school led environmental field trip to the School Forest



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ANIMAL EXPLORATION

- ☐ Try to be quiet enough to spot a white tailed deer in the dawn or dusk
- ☐ Count how many squirrels you can spot in thirty minutes
- ☐ Research the call of a Blue Jay and Cardinal to see if you can pick them out in the forest
- ☐ Search for turkey tracks in the sandy soil
- ☐ Find a feather and try to identify the bird species
- ☐ Identify a red tailed hawk soaring above the canopy
- ☐ Listen for the drilling sound of a woodpecker
- ☐ Spot an Eastern Chipmunk gathering seeds in it cheek pouches
- ☐ Look for a spider web covered in dew
- ☐ Find evidence of an animal's meal such as a chewed acorn, leaf, or other things that may hint at something eaten

