

CHAPTER 14 - Education

Aims:

- Provide learning opportunities related to the Forest for people of all ages and backgrounds.
- Assist schools and other educational organisations in using the Forest as a learning resource.
- Promote links between schools, farming and forestry.

- 14.1** The Forest area already provides a vast range of learning opportunities for schools and the general community. It has the potential to be a huge outdoor classroom. Unfortunately, many of these opportunities are not used. Many schools do not have easy access to the existing opportunities and thought will need to be given as to how best to provide them.
- 14.2** The open spaces, woodlands and wildlife habitat of the Forest area can help to deliver understanding, awareness and knowledge of the environment to pupils and students. If this is all they are used for, they are being underused. Many elements of the National Curriculum can be delivered through study in the local environment. Learning through Landscapes the Forestry Trust for Conservation and Education and the Forest Education Initiative have considerable expertise in drawing out these links and assisting teachers in getting them across in an exciting and innovative way. SEENET (Sustainability and Environmental and Education Network) plays an important role in supporting environmental education and bringing together interest groups.
- 14.3** The Forest Education Initiative, a partnership of the forestry and timber industries, aims to increase young people's understanding of woodlands and the forestry industry. The Forest is in a cluster group for the initiative and a number of innovative projects have been started.
- 14.4** Many schools have developed wildlife areas within their grounds; others do not have the opportunity. Many have grounds which are extensive but are kept as mown grass, often at great expense and with no added value. The creation of wildlife areas which are sustainable is not easy and teachers and pupils need support. School grounds need to be considered as a whole, rather than looking simply

at a specific wildlife area, and integrated into the curriculum. The Learning through Landscapes approach is an excellent model. The Wildlife Trust, the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers and local authorities provide help, though the task is enormous. Small woods in school grounds will be valuable assets in the future.

- 14.5** Where schools have no option to create wildlife areas, there may be a site nearby which could be adopted for study. The Wildlife Trust's Willsbridge Mill, the City Council's Ashton Court Visitor Centre and North Somerset's Goblin Combe Environment Centre currently provide study and support facilities for schools. The city farms provide a critical link between inner-city schools and agriculture, and Leigh Woods offers the opportunity to learn more about the forestry industry. Farmers have expressed an interest in involving and helping schools in studying their farms. The cost of travel and duty of care legislation now makes this kind of contact difficult and local affiliations will become more important.
- 14.6** Teachers need training, guidance and support in using the 'outdoor classroom' and linking it to the curriculum. In-service training is already provided at Ashton Court and Willsbridge Mill, but there is scope for much more.



Schools event, Working Woodlands (Photo: Forest of Avon)

- 14.7** The planning and development of the Forest is also a potential area of study and interest for further and higher education establishments. Several students have already done work in relation to the Forest which has been mutually beneficial. The universities offer an excellent source of data and research expertise.
- 14.8** Improving the understanding of the Forest by a wide range of adults can be achieved through a

CHAPTER 14 - Education

variety of media, e.g. events, training courses, direct involvement and participation, publications, web sites, arts and culture and information at gateways. The Forest partners will need to explore many avenues of approach, especially those targeted at people presently excluded from enjoying and appreciating their environment.

- 14.9** Learning not only occurs within formal education. Areas for play and enjoyment for children will help to foster familiarity with woodland surroundings. Information and interpretation of the Forest will help many people to gain a greater understanding, knowledge and interest in their environment. The farming and forestry industries are keen to assist in helping people from all backgrounds gain better understanding of them, their problems and how to use and enjoy the countryside sympathetically. In the long term, this approach will help to reduce conflicts between urban and farming communities.
- 14.10** Education will be more than environmental education. The Forest will offer opportunities for outdoor adventure activities, which can be as simple as orienteering in school grounds as an introduction to the sport in the wider Forest environment.

Proposals

14.11 The Forest partners will aim to:

- encourage and assist all schools with suitable grounds to develop and use, on a long-term basis, wildlife and woodland areas, using the appropriate grants where possible; schools with inappropriate grounds will be supported in working on nearby sites;
- strive to retain 'surplus' land on school grounds for environmental and amenity benefit; disposal would represent a lost opportunity;
- develop and promote the Bristol and West Cluster group of the Forest Education Initiative.
- work with schools to develop teaching resources which help use the Forest to deliver National Curriculum objectives; these resources will be customised to the needs of clusters of schools and the sites in their vicinity rather than by producing a Forest-wide pack;
- work with the education authorities and with schools to develop a range of in-service training for teachers;
- improve and develop centres where schools, youth groups and interest groups can be supported in studying the environment and deliver a wide range of learning objectives, linked to major Forest gateways; they will also assist and encourage farmers and the forestry industry in making links with schools;
- welcome the involvement of colleges and educational institutions in projects which help to plan, create and provide research data for the Forest.
- develop a range of media, materials events and campaigns aimed at information, interpretation and education for all segments of the community, but in particular those currently excluded from appreciating and enjoying their environment.



BTCV's Tree Life Centre (Photo: Forest of Avon)