

# ChequamegonChirps



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## **The Monday, June 16 meeting will be at the Spencer School Forest**

The Spencer School Forest is located four miles south of Spencer on Highway V, then  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile west on Mann Road. The address is 100505 Mann Road which is on the north side of the road. The gate will open at 6:00 PM with a nature walk scheduled for 6:30 PM and the meeting to start after that about 7:00 PM. The session or at least the meeting will be indoors if there is rain. Ron Draeger will present information about Earth Day and how Wisconsin senator Gaylord Nelson from Clear Lake in Polk County was the instigator of the nationally observed day.

## **Wisconsin's School Forests History**

Wisconsin landscape has changed dramatically since the mid-1800s. At that time the state logging industry started that provided lumber resources across the United States. White pine was the first to be decimated and then other species followed in descending desirability. Logging was done without regard to conservation or preservation. Profit was the driving force and any other considerations be damned. Once the trees were cut, the brutal work of rooting out stumps, picking rocks, and tillage were the next steps to converting areas into farm land. However, soils, drainage and short growing seasons made the land unsuitable for farming in some areas. Abandoned farmland became tax delinquent. A few visionaries played key roles in the establishment of school forests.

In the mid-1920s, H.L. Russell, Dean of the College of Agriculture visited Australia and observed school children trees on public land as an educational project. He thought it would be an idea that could be put to use in Wisconsin. By 1927 Russell's plan was on the way through legislation that permitted school districts to own land for forestry programs.

McNeel, also known as Ranger Mac, a state 4-H leader in the 1920s, had a vision for Wisconsin resources—for both land and youth. Wisconsin students became conservation stewards as they planted a Wisconsin their children and grandchildren could be proud of. The first three tracts of land were purchased or

donated for school forests in Laona, Crandon, and Wabeno which were dedicated in 1928. Legislation was passed in 1935 mandating that conservation education be taught in all high schools, vocational schools and universities or colleges. School forests provided a great outdoor classroom. School forests gained another boost in 1949 when Wisconsin school forests statutes were revised. Schools became eligible to receive planting stock from state forest nurseries and use of the foresters for forest management plans. When titles were given to school districts, they were generally transferred for only \$1. Founders intended for school forests to provide students with hands-on experience in tree planting and forest management.

Although conservation education has evolved and taken on several new names, the concept remains the same today. Bill Sylvester, UW Extension forester was instrumental in moving the school forest program to UW Stevens Point in the 1970s. Student participation can produce lifetime educational influences. Ron Draeger was a school forest counselor when he was a sophomore at Marshfield High School for 6<sup>th</sup> grade students. Among his instructing he taught tree identification, pond sampling, and collecting edibles—which included insects. Teaching is one of the best ways of learning. Ron remembers this teaching experience well and continues to use that knowledge and continues to expand a large variety of school forest influenced interests. Two local school projects that I'm aware of are in progress now at Abbotsford and Colby. Abby students are planting hundreds of trees near the school including maples which will be tapped in the future. Colby's school forest is in the process of select harvesting by a commercial logger with opportunities for students to be involved in all phases of the operation that may produce up to \$10,000 of income

Most of this information came from an article written by Gail Gilson-Pierce from an article in a winter edition of Northbound.

### **Turtle Time**

The following is from an article passed on to me by Scott—with some additions from an anonymous source to protect me. There are 11 kinds of turtles in Wisconsin with four species rare or endangered. Human activity is one of the biggest threats to turtle populations, including roadkill at this time of the year. The rarer species are especially found in protected areas with less development and traffic, like the Chequamegon National Forest, and along some public trails.

For example, the mowing and trail maintenance schedules along the Pine Line Trail in Taylor County are modified to protect turtles.

Even the most common turtles can be wiped out along local ponds and streams. The most important thing you can do, if you can do it safely, is to stop if you see a turtle on the road and help it cross in the direction it was going. If you encounter a snapping turtle, there are a few ways to safely help a snapper, but one way is to simply offer it a stick to bite down on, and pull it gently across the road. Going beyond that basic help, you can report turtle observations—dead or alive of any species—to the DNR Turtle Conservation program. These reports will affect future conservation efforts. For example, during road improvements, designers may adjust the style and location of a culvert to make “turtle crossings” safe. For more information and to contribute to turtle reporting, visit:

<https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/Wildlifehabitat/TurtleConservation>

I’ve got a story or two about turtles as I suspect most of us have. Our house is adjacent to a river so snapping turtles of different sizes would come up to the south edge of the granite road to lay their eggs. When one of us saw such an event, the rest of the family would be notified and we would watch the process. We tried to not get too close and it didn’t seem to disturb them. We never got an exact count of eggs from a (clutch?) but some had to be in excess of two dozen. That would be from a larger turtle. Some of the egg layers had shells of no more than eight inches long. The largest one I saw was maybe 18 inches, but kind of squashed since it had been run over. I don’t like to think someone would do that deliberately, but some people have very different ideas than I do. Anyway, it was a hot day and that beast already smelled bad. Since it was dead I picked it up by the tail and started carrying it toward the ditch. All at once the tail started to twist and my reaction was to drop it and get out of the way. Later I read that after they are dead, turtles can still have muscle reactions. That didn’t lessen the Holy Crap moment I had then. Later I’ve found out larger turtles shouldn’t be picked up by the tail as it can injure their spine. I do know—without the experience I had I wouldn’t want to be bitten by any turtle of any size. What would you do if it wouldn’t let go? One more comment from an incident long ago. My dad grew up on an Iowa farm. He claimed they found a snapping turtle so big that a number five washtub didn’t fit over it. When I was a kid I used to take a bath in that size of a tub. Maybe that was why I wasn’t real fond of baths. Could that turtle have been that big? Maybe turtles get larger with retelling stories over time. Fish do.

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#### Club contacts

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#### June and July Events

Full Moon July 10

Summer Solstice June 20

Turtles crossing roads to lay eggs

Earliest migrants soon start to move south

Fledglings coming to feeders with parents

