



FINAL DRAFT

Creating a National Network of Children's Forests

What is a Children's Forest?

Get outside... Learn... Make a connection... Children's Forests are places where kids and families are connecting to the outdoors. Visit your local Children's Forest for a high quality outdoor learning experience created by kids and their communities. Explore the opportunities for kids to get involved in hands-on projects, learn about natural environments, and take care of these special places.

Goals

Children's Forests share a commitment to four national goals:

1. Connect kids, families, and adults to healthy outdoor activities across all landscapes.
2. Create new education and career opportunities.
3. Foster an understanding of how our changing environment affects the world and how people can work together to embrace these changes.
4. Provide professional development opportunities for educators, with emphasis on conservation and the natural world.

Common Elements of Children's Forests

Consistency for the national network of Children's Forest is important. To support consistency the common elements:

- Create a recognizable identity that is unique to Children's Forests;
- Improve communications and learning among field professionals;
- Encourage successful strategies and useful resources to be shared widely;
- Promote efficient evaluation of the programs individually and as a whole.



1. Children's Forests are recognized as setting a high standard for youth education and empowerment.

- Children's Forest programs and activities are known for engaging high quality partners and set the standard for exceptional outdoor education experiences - ***"I trust my kid will have a great experience at a Children's Forest."***
- Elements of a recognizable identity:
 - Projects use the name "Children's Forest" in the project title or "A Part of the National Network of Children's Forests" as a subheading.
 - Adopt common standards for developing graphics (e.g., theme art) and using them with graphics of local partners (e.g., style guide).

2. Children's Forests are defined and shaped by local community needs and interests.

- Children's Forests provide a place for the larger community to come together to focus on youth.
- Children's Forest programs are implemented through strong partnerships between USDA Forest Service units and their public and private partners.
- Children's Forest programs inspire youth and communities to make a connection to their unique local places and build a sense of ownership, stewardship and advocacy.
- The name "Children's Forest" evokes a powerful image of a place that can be leveraged to promote stewardship, environmental education, and healthy recreation.
- Elements of a meaningful focus on place:
 - Forests and partners succinctly describe their Children's Forest and its connection to place and the needs and desires of the local community.
 - Children's Forests help youth and the larger community become engaged in the local environmental and conservation priorities.
 - Children's Forests projects contribute to the ecological, economic and social sustainability of forests and communities.

3. Children's Forests engage youth in hands-on stewardship and give youth a voice in shaping the future of these special places:

- Children's Forests engage youth in significant aspects of planning and management to provide hands-on learning opportunities.
- Elements of successfully engaging youth:
 - Incorporate youth input on setting goals and selecting and implementing projects.
 - Provide opportunities for youth to deliver educational programs.
 - Provide opportunities for youth to work closely with professionals at land management agencies and partner organizations.

4. Children's Forests share a commitment to the four national goals:

- By aligning with the national goals, Children's Forests become a critical element in achieving other important Agency efforts such as America's Great Outdoors, the Framework for Sustainable Recreation, and Cultural Transformation.
- Elements of commitment to the four goals:
 - Projects articulate how they align with specific goal[s].



- Projects evaluate how the work of their Children's Forest moves the project toward achieving their goal.

The Growing National Network:

While each Children's Forest will have unique attributes based on the place and the partners involved, each Children's Forest is also part of a nationwide network.

- Elements of participation in the nationwide network:
 - Children's Forests are established locally and approved by the Regional Office, based on nationally consistent criteria.
 - Children's Forests have access to a national peer group through the Community of Practice – "the whole is more than the sum of the parts"
 - Children's Forests use and build on existing programs, tools and methods.

Children's Forest look to communities of place and communities of interest to develop a unique local vision (see list below), while taking part in and contributing to a national network of peer learning. Although the U.S. Forest Service is a central partner in Children's Forest programs, partnerships are critical to the long-term programmatic and financial sustainability of Children's Forests. Through partnerships, the Forest Service shares the work and learning with strong networks of youth, educators, non-profits, environmental and recreation professionals and land managers on the local, regional, state and national level.

The growing network of Children's Forests includes the following programs:

Region 1 - Northern Region

Trails to Discovery Lolo National Forest, MT

Trails to Discovery is a network of Children's Forest sites that strengthen and expand existing youth, service, and conservation education programs. This blend of conservation education, service-learning, and recreation experiences encourages youth and families to be active outdoors and practice healthy lifestyles.

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Helena Children's Forest – Nature's Playground Helena National Forest, MT

Nature's Playground provides for a place for life-long learning and play where art, science, math and language arts are integrated in an outdoor environment. Nature's Playground increases awareness and understanding of natural processes, conservation, and stewardship and serves as bridge between the community and the forest.

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Region 2 – Rocky Mountain Region

Children's Forest Environmental Literacy Model Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests, CO

The Children's Forest Literacy Model institutionalizes field and in-class environmental literacy programs across three local school districts.

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Peaks to Prairies: A Children's Forest Corridor in Colorado Denver and surrounding National Forests, CO

The Peaks to Prairies Children's Forest Corridor will link existing parks and nature centers in the Denver area to create a cohesive network of outdoor spaces. Utilizing the natural connector of the South Platte River, children journey upstream from Denver to the National Forests and downstream to the grasslands. Kids will have opportunities for unstructured play, exploration, education, and stewardship.

Susan Alden Weingart, USFS – salden@fs.fed.us 303-275-5401

Region 3 – Southwestern Region

The Children's Bosque Southwest Regional Office, NM

The Children's Bosque reconnects underserved urban youth and families to healthy outdoor activities and provides a greater appreciation for and understanding of, the natural environment of the Rio Grande River Bosque (forest), in ways that are culturally relevant.

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Margaret Haines, USFS – mhaines@fs.fed.us 505-842-3881

Southern New Mexico Children's Forest Lincoln National Forest, NM

The goal of the Southern New Mexico Children's Forest is to build a strong foundation of environmental literacy—rooted in foundational principles and branching out to the special places, programs, and partners of southern New Mexico.

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Sky Islands Children's Forest Coronado National Forest, AZ

The Sky Islands Children's Forest is a unique system of bio-diverse mountain 'islands' where youth play, learn, grow and care for their world.

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Region 4 – Intermountain Region

Children's Forest Community Partnership Payette National Forest, ID

The Children's Forest Community Partnership uses scientific inquiry to create new educational and career pathways in rural communities.

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Diamond Fork Youth Forest Uinta National Forest, UT

The Diamond Fork Youth Forest offers youth an enjoyable and challenging learning environment. The program stimulates discovery, awareness and understanding of our natural resources through conservation education curriculums and self-exploration and discovery days in a working Urban National Forest.

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Teton Ten Bridger-Teton National Forest , WY

The "Teton Ten Project" will use partnerships with more than 20 organizations to increase children's connection to nature while providing service learning, environmental education, and pivotal outdoor experiences.

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Region 5 – Pacific Southwest Region

National Children's Forest – San Bernardino National Forest San Bernardino National Forest, CA

The mission of the National Children's Forest is to provide opportunities for children to take a leadership role in forest management by giving them a legitimate voice in caring for our local mountains; and through formal education and volunteer programs, evoke a fascination with nature that engenders a commitment to life-long learning and environmental stewardship.

Sarah Miggins, Southern California Mountains Foundation – smiggins@fs.fed.us 909-382-2796

Pope-Baldwin Children's Forest Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit, CA

The Pope-Baldwin Children's Forest uses sites within the Pope-Baldwin Recreation Area to educate local youth on ecosystem health, land management and conservation issues.

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Cedar Pass Children's Forest Modoc National Forest, CA

The Cedar Pass Children's Forest will maximize a wide variety of educational resources and recreation opportunities within the Cedar Pass Forest Health Restoration Project area. The primary component is an outdoor education program offering place-based, experiential learning in the forest environment.



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Region 6 – Pacific Northwest Region

Deschutes Children's Forest

Deschutes National Forest, Central Oregon (Bend), OR

The Deschutes Children's Forest provides a network of outdoor places and programs dedicated to moving all children along a continuum of learning, exploration, and healthy living through engagement with nature.

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Larry Berrin, Discover Your Northwest – lberrin@fs.fed.us 541-383-4771

Upper Columbia Children's Forest

Colville National Forest, WA

The Upper Columbia Children's Forest will reach beyond forest boundaries to serve the communities of northeastern Washington with a diverse menu of place-based, classroom-based and special events that provide opportunities for meaningful youth engagement.

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Region 8 – Southern Region

Atlanta Children's Forest Network

Forest Service Southern Region Office, GA

The Atlanta Children's Forest Network increases opportunities for families to get active in nature by connecting them to publicly-owned forests in their communities and the greater Atlanta region.

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Children's Forest in Texas – El Bosque de los Niños en Texas

National Forests and Grasslands in Texas, TX

"El Bosque de los Niños en Texas" provides access on public and private lands for children, schools, and entire communities for enjoyment, to foster awareness, inspire a sense of stewardship and encourage a lifetime commitment to care for the land.

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Region 9 – Eastern Region

Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest Children's Forest

Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest, WI

The Children's Forest designation will invigorate existing partnerships as well as create new ones, in turn increasing the linkages that provide opportunities for kids to connect to nature.

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Children's Forest in the City Forest Service Eastern Region, WI

The Milwaukee Rotary Centennial arboretum will be created in the heart of Milwaukee. The 40-acre space including children's kiosks, nature play areas, and sensory gardens will give young people a rare opportunity to connect with nature in an urban setting.

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Southern Illinois Children's Forest Shawnee National Forest, IL

The Children's Forest unites current and new partner-agency programs together and inspires them to collaborate within communities and across landscapes in new ways, to engage kids of all ages throughout southern Illinois with their natural and cultural heritage.

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Region 10 – Alaska Region

Chugach Children's Forest Chugach National Forest, AK

A symbolic designation for the entire Chugach National Forest, the Children's Forest is a ground-breaking new program that creates exciting opportunities for Alaska's youth and communities to connect with Alaska's magnificent public lands.

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Tongass Children's Forest Tongass National Forest, AK

The Tongass Children's Forest will embody the cumulative efforts to programmatically and philosophically address the needs of youth in southeast Alaska: to give them a place to play, think, and grow so that they may become citizens that care about and are involved with the future of public lands.

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