



Schoolyard Habitat Program

California and Nevada Region

What is a Schoolyard Habitat project?

“A Schoolyard Habitat” can mean many different things to many different people, however, for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service there is a specific niche that our Schoolyard Habitat Program fills within the spectrum of resources for schools, as well as a specific need that they fill within the Fish and Wildlife Service mission.

A Service schoolyard habitat project is a naturalized habitat area that is created by students, for students. It is ecologically sound, integrated into the curriculum and designed to encourage long-term stewardship. Typical projects created through this program include: wetlands, meadows, forests and variations among them based on specific ecoregions. Many projects are planned through multiple phases and become more dynamic over time as children from various classes build upon the existing work of past students.

Benefits of a Schoolyard Habitat

Schoolyard Habitat projects are designed to achieve the mission and goals of the school, the Service, and the community. They address multiple environmental and educational concepts that benefit all involved, particularly the students.



- **Ecologically sound:** Schoolyard habitat projects provide habitat for local and migratory wildlife including songbirds, shorebirds, small mammals, reptiles, amphibians, insects and more. In many cases, these habitats also provide a vegetative buffer to nearby streams, helping to reduce pollution reaching these waterways. To be ecologically sound the schoolyard habitats must be large enough in size and scope so they have a lasting impact on the local environment.
- **Integrated into the curriculum:** Schoolyard habitats offer many teaching and learning opportunities in English, science, mathematics, history, geography, social studies and art. The process of planning, creating and using a schoolyard habitat exposes children to unique hands-on experiences. A well-designed schoolyard habitat provides the opportunity for authentic long term data collection, which teachers attest is an important element for effective teaching.
- **Stewardship:** Research has shown that during the formative years of life, students develop perceptions and values about their environment. If designed and managed well by students, schoolyards can provide them with a powerful example of good land stewardship. Experts have demonstrated that young children are driven to explore, discover and play while refining motor skills. A schoolyard that includes a diversity of natural areas allows students to exercise these needs while nurturing the development of a land ethic that values natural spaces.

Restoring a native habitat on a school site provides opportunities for:

- **Children:** to develop knowledge and skills as they undertake an exciting, real-life project.
- **Teachers:** to use the broad context of restoring the school yard to help enliven teaching and learning that can weave through the curriculum from kindergarten through 12th grade – and beyond.
- **A school:** to create opportunities for community involvement and diversify the schoolyard environment.

Restoring a school landscape provides the opportunity to engage students in:

- Scientific inquiry in a meaningful context;
- Hands-on, minds-on learning;
- Real-life, important decisions that build confidence and resiliency;
- Interdisciplinary learning in a broad context;
- Work among peers, classes, grades and schools.
- Community involvement through cooperative projects.



Schoolyard Habitat Locations

Schoolyard habitat projects are primarily built on school property. However, as long as the location is accessible to students on a daily basis, projects may be built nearby on private or Tribal lands; in a community park; refuge; or on corporate lands.

Getting Started

The first step to creating a successful Schoolyard Habitat Project is to create a team that includes students, teachers, parents, administrators and community members who will support the project. This team will ensure the project is created with full participation of the school, and will create the foundation of support the school needs for sustainability.

Connecting people with nature is one of the Fish and Wildlife Service's top priorities. The Schoolyard Habitat Program is one of the many ways the Service is achieving this priority. Specific funding has been set aside to complete projects with schools. Funding can be used for:

- **Habitat Restoration:** habitat restoration projects on school grounds for use as living laboratories and a natural environment for plants and animals;
- **Outreach and Education:** training classroom teachers to develop, implement and maintain conservation projects at schools; and collaborative schoolyard habitat conservation planning and training in cooperation with community-based groups.

Schools or organizations serving kindergarten through 12th grade students are eligible for funding and may receive up to \$8,000 for their projects. They must be working cooperatively with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to be eligible for funding consideration.

Learn More

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service employees can provide additional information on the Schoolyard Habitat program in the California and Nevada Region: www.fws.gov/cno.

In addition, more information about the children and nature movement is available from the Children and Nature Network's website at www.childrenandnature.org.

