

# Vilas County Success from the Field

## Partnership Teaches Sustainable Practices and Resource Management



Nestled in Eagle River, Wisconsin, on 30 forested acres of land is a natural resources specialty school that uses a combination of field and classroom studies to teach sustainable practices, as well as demonstrating the benefits of contemporary resource management. These field-based programs place students in direct contact with resources that support human needs and teach knowledge and skills leading to responsible lifestyle choices. The experience inspires informed participation in policy-making and promotes stewardship and renewal of natural resources by future generations.

Trees For Tomorrow (TFT) was founded as an independent, nonprofit organization in 1944 by a group of Wisconsin paper and electric utility companies for the purpose of reforesting northern Wisconsin, as well as educating landowners and citizens about the need for proper land management. In the 1940s and '50s TFT gave away tree seedlings, lent out planting machines and hired foresters to develop management plans for landowners. The organization also established an education facility in Eagle River and used the recovering northern forest to teach school students, their teachers and the public about the need for proper forestry practices.

In the 1960s, with reforestation substantially completed, TFT turned all its energy to education. Today, "Trees" is the Midwest's leading natural resource specialty school providing field workshops renowned for their effectiveness in teaching natural resource conservation and management concepts to students, teachers and the public.

### Program Successes

Each year, the school holds a Careers in Natural Resources workshop open to high school sophomores, juniors and graduating seniors. High School students discover if a natural resources career is the path to their future. Students who participate in the Trees For Tomorrow's Careers in Natural Resources workshop meet foresters, fisheries and wildlife biologists, water resource specialists, conservation wardens, recreation land managers and more! They experience real-life field work and develop outdoor skills. They also learn what various occupations require for education or training, what they pay and what today's job market is like. This field day has always brought back memories for NRCS Soil Conservation Technician Tom Melnarik, being one of those very high school students at Trees for Tomorrow back in 1980. "I remember thinking about how interesting a career in natural resources might be," added Melnarik. Little did he know that someday he'd be one of the instructors as an NRCS employee. "It is a great feeling of coming full circle and of giving back," says Tom.

NRCS has been an active participant in the Careers program for the last 10 years, providing students with an introduction into the soil



and conservation aspects of our work. "This introductory look into the work we do includes a pitch for all USDA jobs, and gets the students thinking about the many locations and opportunities available around the country and around the world," explained Tom.

Some of the hands-on field activities that NRCS staff provide the high schoolers are an introduction into land surveying techniques. The students also learn how to use a laser level, set up a field book, texture and classify soils according to color and begin to understand how the soil and conservation professionals in NRCS work together to provide technical assistance and on-the-ground expertise to install conservation practices. They are given examples of the sort of projects we do and the varied clientele we serve. Some of these students will surely become the conservation professionals of the future. NRCS staff is committed to spreading the conservation message and encouraging today's youth to consider a career in *Helping People Help the Land*.

**Wisconsin  
 Natural  
 Resources  
 Conservation  
 Service**

