

# School Forest news



The North Woods School in Cook designated over 83 acres in June (50 acres owned by Field Township and 33.75 acres of school-owned land). Students, teacher Rick Pierce, and township chair Keith Aho brought the community together to create the Field/North Woods School Forest. Using this experience, students created an action project for the Youth Energy Summit YES! program and received 1st place in their region! The award included grant money to build and install an ADA-compliant bridge for better hiking and cross country skiing access. This year students will study soils to determine the best area for a campsite and outhouse. Future plans also include trail development, solar lighting, and Ojibwa and English interpretive signs. Through their partnership the school and township hope to increase both education and recreation opportunities to surrounding schools and the community.



## **Wildfire provides valuable lessons**

Dry winds, coupled with seven acres of dried grasses and dormant trees, fueled an unexpected fire at the Oneka School Forest in Hugo. Because the School Forest is located about 100 feet from the school's back door, students could watch while safely inside and see how crews from local fire departments and the DNR worked to contain the fire. After the fire, teachers capitalized on the experience, teaching students about fire, succession, and regrowth. For example some students are tracking plants and growth in different areas around the school. Others are using math to measure how high the fire went on trees. A group of fifth graders that went birding the day before and are now comparing pre- and post-fire wildlife observations. They're also discovering pieces of burned trash and using identification skills to figure out what it was

before it melted. The best part is that both teachers and students now appreciate how fire affects an ecosystem and can watch how quickly nature grows back from the ashes.



### **Entering beaver's territory**

Students at Lakewood School Forest in Duluth had an exciting winter trip in the forest. They went out to the pond to learn about ice conditions and safety. Suddenly, a noise came from under the ice below them. Thump! Thump! Thump! The students gasped and froze in place. Then they realized what it was, a beaver! The presence of beavers is nothing new to the students as they often study their tracks, mud slides, and observe the dams and chewed trees while visiting the forest. But this was quite the experience having the beaver so close and only separated by a thin layer of ice. The thumping was a way to send out an alarm to alert its mate to the danger of students nearby and to try and scare off the kids. They knew it was best to retreat and leave the beavers be.



### **Blackduck School Forest students take part in the U.S. Capitol Christmas Tree Tour**

Students from the Blackduck School Forest took part in the 2014 U.S. Capitol Christmas Tree Tour in a variety of ways. In the spring, they created Christmas ornaments to decorate the tree. In May, the Future Farmers of America (FFA) students accompanied USDA Forest Service staff to learn about national Christmas tree qualities and how to search for the perfect tree. Then in October, during the tree cutting ceremony in the Chippewa National Forest, the FFA students ushered guests and helped manage the day's events. A few days later the tree visited the Blackduck School where all students were able to sign the trailer and see the tree. Mark Friesen, School Forest coordinator spoke at the event and highlighted the involvement of the FFA students.