



Photo courtesy of Catherine Inman, Wasilla Soil and Water Conservation District

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Schoolyard Habitats in Alaska

Creating Outdoor Classrooms

"Children are born with a sense of wonder and an affinity for nature. Properly cultivated, these values can mature into ecological literacy, and eventually into sustainable patterns of living" Zenobia Barlow, Center for Ecoliteracy

Young children are driven to explore. At an early age, they develop perceptions and values about their environment. Their awe and appreciation for fish, wildlife and their habitat creates a foundation upon which a stewardship ethic can be fostered. To ensure that future generations of Alaskans continue to value, protect, and benefit from Alaska's natural resources, children need to spend time outdoors learning.

Today's children spend less time playing outdoors than any previous generation. The Service is working with others to reverse this trend and uses Schoolyard Habitats as a way to reconnect children with nature and provide widespread and long-term benefits to children, communities, and fish and wildlife.

Schoolyard Habitats

A Schoolyard Habitat is an improvement to schoolgrounds or nearby lands that makes them more hospitable for native fish and wildlife while providing an accessible place outdoors for children to learn about and connect with nature on a daily basis.

The Service has funding to foster the development of Schoolyard Habitats and provides on-site technical assistance to school-communities who wish to create sustainable outdoor classrooms that also benefit native fish and wildlife.

What do Schoolyard Habitats look like?

Schoolyard Habitats can take many forms as they are designed to achieve the mission and goals of the school, the Service, and the community. Schoolyard Habitats are also dynamic – they can be planned through multiple phases, with new students building upon the existing work of past students. Schools are encouraged to engage their students in coming up with ideas for habitat features that foster learning and provide habitat for native fish and wildlife.

Benefits of a Schoolyard Habitat

Restoring or creating a native habitat on or adjacent to school grounds benefits students, teachers, and the community while helping the Service achieve its mission to conserve fish and wildlife for the American people.

Getting Started

The first step towards a successful Schoolyard Habitat project is creating a team that includes students, teachers, parents, administrators, ground maintenance, community members, and natural resource experts who will support the project. This team will ensure that the project is created with full participation of the school and will create the foundation of support the school needs to create and maintain the Schoolyard Habitat.

Target Outcomes of Schoolyard Habitats:

- improved student performance/health
- improved habitat for native fish and wildlife
- student and community ownership in conservation
- living laboratories
- endless options for special projects and scientific inquiry
- awareness of local native species and their habitat needs
- a focal point for students, parents and community members
- new opportunities to creatively meet curriculum/learning standards

Inquiries about Schoolyard Habitats are welcome! Please contact one our Fish and Wildlife Field Offices:

Anchorage Field Office

Jeff Heys
605 West 4th Ave
Anchorage AK 99501
907/271-2781
jeffrey_heys@fws.gov

Fairbanks Field Office

Mitch Osborne
101 12th Ave, Rm 110
Fairbanks, AK 99701
907/456-0209
mitch_osborne@fws.gov

Juneau Field Office

Neil Stichert
3000 Vintage Park Blvd, Ste 201
Juneau, AK 99801
907/780-1180
neil_stichert@fws.gov

Kenai Field Office

Cheryl Anderson
43655 Kalifornsky Beach Rd
Soldotna, AK 99669
907/260-0129
cheryl_anderson@fws.gov