













This guide provides examples of common positive and negative impacts of Forest School activities, for use in preparing an Ecological Impact Assessment for your site. You may have some or all of the following impacts on your Forest School site! Use this guide as a prompt.







Negative impacts on site ecology ☹️

Activity and Impact	Ecological layer	Photo(s)	Management actions
Fire pits, leading to burnt vegetation and change in chemical composition of soil.	soil layer	 fire pit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enclose fire pit so fires are well contained, or use a fire bowl. • Limit the frequency of fires to allow soil to recover. • If the site is large enough, rotate fire locations. Fires should be at least 4 metres from surrounding trees.
Digging soil / mud kitchens that can damage soil structure and tree roots.	soil layer	 mud kitchen  digging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contain area of digging and reduce frequency of activity. • Move areas of digging away from tree roots. • Replant/resow areas of digging to allow plants to regrow. • Talk to children about how to look after bug life in the soil and any plants that they find. • Identify tree roots and talk to children about the role of roots and how we can protect them.
Footfall in popular areas of the site, leading to erosion and compaction of soil.	soil layer	 erosion  path erosion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Divert or create new paths. • Woodchip paths to reduce soil erosion – but beware importing woodchip from other sites, due to the risk of introducing pests and diseases. • Rotate popular play areas and allow areas to recover. • Use multiple paths through sites to spread impact.
Woodland play that can lead to trampling of plants / young trees.	field / understorey layer	 tree sapling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify young plants with children. • Mark them with a stake/tube or other method. • Agree a plan with the children a plan to avoid damaging plants through play. • Put brush (branches) or logs around young plants to protect them. Consider fencing for large areas of young trees (> 20 trees).





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Den building, which removes dead wood from field layer reducing available insect fodder and habitat .	field layer	 den building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce size and number of dens built. • Create a pile of den building wood that children know is OK to use. • Create other dead wood piles on site, and agree with the children that these are for wildlife habitat, not den building.
Collecting fire wood and kindling, reducing available deadwood habitat.	field layer	 firewood pile	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce amount of firewood collected. • Consider buying local firewood from sustainably harvested sources instead, or ask for donations. • Encourage the creation of new dead wood habitats on site and agree with the children that these are for wildlife, not firewood.
Breaking tree branches through play, tree swings, ropes and slack lines.	understorey layer	 rope swings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk with children about how to care for and look after the tree and why. • Remove swings from any damaged branches and engage a tree surgeon/ arboriculturist to advise on tree health. • Take down ropes at the end of each session for the safety of other users of the site, and protection of the tree.
Bark damage: bark stripping through play, and/or damage through tree swings, ropes and slack lines .	understorey layer	 rope damage to bark	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk with children about how to care for and look after the tree. • Engage a tree surgeon / arboriculturist to advise on tree health. • Buy or make tree protectors that pad between the tree and the rope/slack line. • Take down ropes at the end of sessions for safety and tree protection.
Tree guards breaking / plastic waste from tree guards which can harm wildlife.	understorey layer	 broken tree guard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remove tree guards once the cover becomes a tight fit on the tree. • Periodically remove guards if mortality has occurred. • Engage children with activities about reducing plastic waste and recycling. • Use other natural materials to protect tree such as brash, bramble and nettle.
Heat from fire damaging tree canopy.	canopy layer	 fire pit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Light fires at least 4 metres away from large trees and any overhanging branches. • Reduce frequency of fires / spread locations to reduce impact.

Positive impacts on site ecology 😊

Description of Impact	Ecological layer	Photo(s)	Management actions
<p>Pond creation, creating new habitats for invertebrates, frogs and other animal and plant pond-life.</p>	soil /field layer		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage children with creating new ponds on site. Explore natural options such as clay for lining ponds. Introduce pond plants and make ponds frog friendly. Survey the wildlife in your pond regularly with children. Ponds are one of the most biodiversity enhancing features you can add to a site! Remove excess leaves from pond regularly to prevent build up.
<p>Creating new deadwood habitats for insects including bees, small mammals including hedgehogs, and other animal life.</p>	field / understory layer	 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage children with creating new habitats from deadwood piles and old wood. Research how to encourage different types of wildlife through habitat creation on your site. Survey wildlife with the children to show the positive impact the new habitats are bringing.
<p>Promoting plant diversity by clearing brambles and invasive plant species such as rhododendron, Japanese knotweed <i>etc.</i>*</p> <p>*ensure that all invasive plant material is disposed of in accordance with government regulations.</p>	field layer		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify any invasive species on your site. Organise a day for parents and volunteers (or even older children) to clear overgrown areas. Ensure some overgrown areas of brambles, nettles <i>etc</i> are left for wildlife.
<p>Sowing wildflower seeds, promoting biodiverse meadow habitat.</p>	field layer		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sow new wildflower meadows with the children. Talk with children about caring for meadows, not pulling up flowers <i>etc.</i> Create a plant identification activity once the wildflowers emerge in Spring. Survey the nature present with children regularly to show the positive impact meadows can bring.
<p>Tree planting / new woodland creation. Benefits include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creation of new play areas Biodiversity increase (plant, bird, and invertebrate habitats) Climate change mitigation through carbon absorption. 	understorey / canopy layer		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Involve children in tree planting and care of young trees. Try planting willow, hazel and other fast growing species to create small structures and play areas. Keep trees protected with tree guards when small. Monitor pest / disease impact on young plants. Survey the nature of these areas regularly with the children (birds, insects, <i>etc</i>).

Positive impacts on site ecology 😊

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<p>Pruning fruit trees to promote new growth, more blossom for insects and improve fruit yield.</p> <p>Planting new fruit trees to increase food for pollinators, birds and other wildlife.</p>	canopy layer		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage with local volunteer groups who may have knowledge to share. Attend pruning training days or employ an arboriculturist to prune trees on your site. Harvest a share of the fruit (leaving some for the birds!) and share amongst school community or use in Forest School activities.
<p>Minimise the spread of tree pests and diseases on your site.</p>	canopy layer		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employ an arboriculturist or tree surgeon to remove diseased trees where appropriate, to slow spread of diseases that are spread via root contact between trees, such as honey fungus and Dutch elm disease. Practice good biosecurity such as cleaning boots and equipment after site visits. Install a boot washing station for yourself and the children. Report sightings of pests and diseases to the relevant authority (in the UK, the online Forestry Commission TreeAlert service).
<p>Coppicing and pollarding tree species such as willow and hazel, increasing light to forest floor, promoting ground flora diversity and creating valuable insect, bird and mammal habitat.</p>	canopy layer		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage with local volunteer groups who may have knowledge to share, or employ an arboriculturist to coppice/pollard trees on your site. Retain wood harvested for creative projects / firewood / deadwood habitat. Fence newly coppiced areas to protect trees from rabbits / deer.
<p>Creating new habitats for birds.</p>	canopy layer		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plan a bird box creation and monitoring activity with the children. Create activities to identify birds, observe their behaviour and chart biodiversity change over the seasons. Make bird feeders with children and ensure bird feeders are available during the winter for birds.

Log your positive and negative impacts on **myForest for Education**: a free online tool enabling educators to create maps and management plans for Forest School sites.
 Visit: www.sylva.org.uk/myforest

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