

WINTER SOLSTICE - DECEMBER 21, 2025

VOL. 30 ISSUE 4 • WINTER 2025-2026

the gem

KICKAPOO VALLEY RESERVE NEWSLETTER
SINCE 2000

We are excited to introduce a new name for the Kickapoo Valley Reserve Newsletter. Formerly published as Update, The Gem connects the KVR community with information and news. As we embrace the beauty of winter and the Winter Solstice, we take a moment to reflect on the past year. We eagerly anticipate the arrival of longer days and remain committed to preserving and protecting the cultural and natural resources of the Kickapoo Valley Reserve, ensuring it remains a unique sanctuary for all to enjoy and a perfect escape into nature.

The Winter Solstice marks the transition to longer days, bringing renewal and a return to light.

WINTER SOLSTICE - CELEBRATE THE DARKEST DAY

How will you connect with the nature and the Winter Solstice?

Fire and Light

- Safely light candles or lanterns
- Have a bonfire or campfire
- Burn a Yule Log

Decorating and Giving to Nature

- Decorate with foraged evergreens & berries
- Share edible ornaments outdoors like pinecones with birdseed and lard.

Feasting & Reflection

- Gather for a feast
- Enjoy candlelit meals
- Reflect on the past year

Outdoor & Nature

- Watch the sun rise or set
- Enjoy a winter nature walk
- Create a winter spiral out of evergreens

WELCOME
WINTER IN THE
KICKAPOO
VALLEY



Skiers on Old Hwy 131 Trail
Photo by KVR

WHAT'S HAPPENING

Dec 24 – 25 | Visitor Center closed
 Dec 31 – Jan 1, 2026 | Visitor Center closed
 Jan 1, 2026 | 2026 Trail Challenge begins
 Jan 2, 2026 | Creative Communities canvases available
 Jan 7, 2026 | Nature Bound winter session begins
 Jan 10, 2026 | Winter Festival
 Jan 10, 2026 | Driftless Dialogue - Raptors
 Jan 15, 2026 | 6 pm, KRMB Meeting
 Jan 19, 2026 | Visitor Center closed
 Jan 20, 2026 | 5:30 pm, Land Management Committee meeting
 Feb 19, 2026 | 6 pm, KRMB meeting
 Feb 21, 2026 | 10 am, KVR Guided Ice Hike
 Feb 23, 2026 | 4:30 pm, Canvases due back to Visitor Center
 Feb 28, 2026 | 10 am, KVR Guided Ice Hike
 Mar 3, 2026 | 5:30 pm, Driftless Dialogue – Prescribed Fire
 Mar 4, 2026 | Student Art Experience
 Mar 7, 2026 | Creative Communities Exhibit Grand Opening
 Mar 18, 2026 | Nature Bound Spring session begins
 Mar 19, 2026 | 6 pm, KRMB meeting



Directors Discourse

BY JASON LEIS - KVR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

As we celebrate the Winter Solstice and upcoming holiday season, it is a time to be generous, show your appreciation for loved ones, reflect on what happened last year and make some resolutions for next year.

I want to thank all those who came out for the Friends of KVR Holiday Happening event and showed your generosity, donating your time, money and talents to make it a great community event. I really appreciate the Friends members and the rest of the community that continue to support the Kickapoo Valley Reserve.



L to R: Ashley Walker - Friends of KVR President, Joan Kent - Volunteer & Friend of KVR, Jason Leis - KVR Executive Director

We have done some great things on the Reserve this past year and I hope to do many more in the year to come with the help of our supporters and collaborators.

Winter Festival is right around the corner on Saturday, January 10th. You can find opportunities in this newsletter to volunteer and help make the long-standing favorite event another great one. It is great to see the community come together, embrace winter and have a little fun.

I wish you all a great holiday season filled with everything that makes you and your loved ones happy!

Jason



Time to Renew!

JANA MUEHLENKAMP - GUEST SERVICES ASSOCIATE

With the change of the calendar to a new year, it also reminds us that it is time to purchase or renew your Kickapoo Valley Reserve (KVR) 2026 Annual Pass or Friends of KVR membership.

Passes are required for visitors to use the trails for activities on the KVR such as hiking, biking, horseback riding, cross-country skiing, and snowshoeing. Your annual pass also gives you parking privilege to river access landings.

Disabled Veterans, former POWs and Tribal Members of the Ho-Chunk Nation may obtain an annual pass at no cost.

2026 Annual Passes are on sale now. You can buy them online or at the Visitor Center during normal business hours.



Guided ice hike on the KVR

Become a Friend of KVR

DIANE GLOEDE - GUEST SERVICES ASSOCIATE

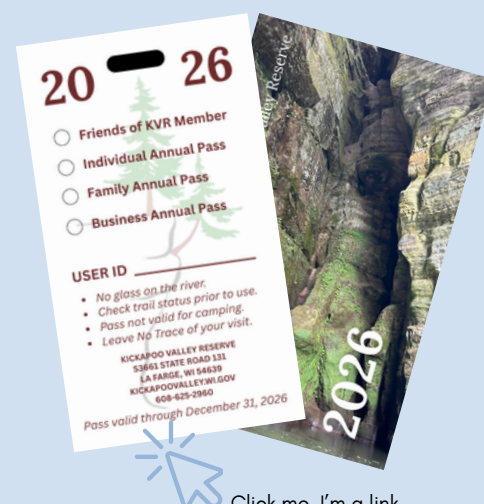
Did you know that for a \$15.00 donation when purchasing an individual or family annual pass you can become a Friend of KVR and support the important educational and environmental work the Reserve brings to the community each year? Along with your annual pass as a Friend, you will receive a subscription to the Friends of KVR Newsletter, exclusive gift shop member-only sales and the opportunity to connect with other Friends of KVR members.

It's a fun way to support KVR with your dollars, volunteer your time, lend your skills and make new friends along the way!

Gift certificates for a Friends Membership are also available and make great holiday gifts.



Seasonal Field Notes



Click me, I'm a link.

KVR Annual Passes are available now! They make a great gift!





Education Corner

NATURE BOUND WINTER SESSION

Registration is open!

WINTER SEMESTER
January 7 - February 25

[LEARN MORE ABOUT
NATURE BOUND PROGRAMS](#)



Winter Nature Bound

AMBER BURCH - KVR EDUCATION COORDINATOR

While the joy of Nature Bound Fall is watching the transition of the seasons, the big hit of Winter is the snow! We're hoping we have a good season ahead for the Nature Bound students to explore how nature adapts. Some of nature's best lessons can be learned when the trees are bare and the grasses low.



Winter Nature Bound

Nature Bound is a program for preschool/homeschool students from 18 months to 12 years old with three semesters annually. Each semester runs for eight weeks with the option to sign up for half or the full semester. Nature Bound 2026 Winter is set to begin January 7 and run through February 25. It will be held Wednesdays from 9am to 12pm. Registration for the first half of the Winter semester ends on January 4th, and the second half of the semester on February 1st. At the end of each semester, students get to pick a book to take home, thanks to generous donations from local libraries, Driftless Books, and supporters like you!



2026 Summer Adventure Camps

Planning is well underway for a whole lot of fun in that warm summer sun! Be on the lookout for more information on Youth Summer Adventure Camps! Registration opens in February and camps fill quickly. Interested in sending your child to Summer Adventure Camp but not sure how to make it fit financially? Thanks to generous donations from Friends of KVR, scholarships are available! [Reach out to us](#) for more information about youth program scholarships.





Fall Nature Bound Wrap Up

BY AMBER BURCH - KVR EDUCATION COORDINATOR

What a beautiful fall we had! Nature Bound Fall students got to explore this transitional season and experience the full array of temperatures and adventures.

The eight-week semester of Nature Bound started in September and finished up mid-November, with temperatures ranging from 70 degrees down to 20 degrees. Thirty-three students got to watch the leaves change from deep greens to vibrant shades of color to crispy brown and on the ground. They saw ample woolly bear caterpillars on the trails, swans and geese on the ponds, and signs of critters preparing for winter.



Each group had their own set of highlights. The 18mo-2yr old Nature Seeds talked about colors, common animals, and how the seasons change. The 3-4-year-old Nature Sprouts hiked great distances in search of wild animals; they found some birds and bugs and a strong sense of adventure! The 5-7-year-old Nature Sprigs talked about many nature neighbors like bats and explored in the cave and other dark places hoping to catch a glimpse of the little brown mammal. The 8-12-year-old Nature Buds built ecosystems to watch how nature keeps balance. Their ecosystem experiments are thriving, and if all goes well, will be studied by students in Nature Bound Winter and Spring.



Education Corner



JOIN KVR YOUTH SKI CLUB



Hurray for snow.

Youth interested in learning more about cross-country skiing, KVR Youth Ski Club is for you. No experience necessary!

Orientation Meeting- January 8, 2026, pick up your rental skis then.

KVR Youth Ski Club will meet weekly beginning in January while there is snow. Registration is required.

[Learn more here](#)



On 8600 Acres

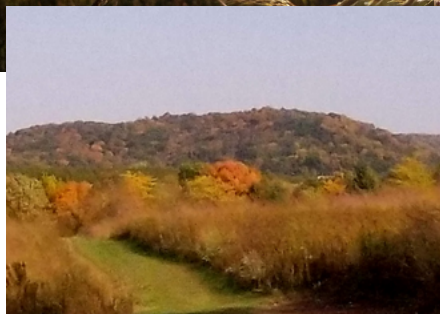
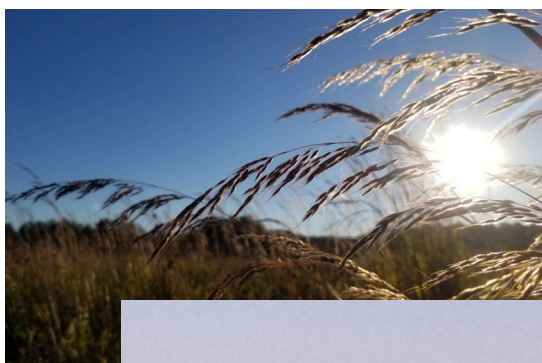
Winter Recreation Reminders

- Foot traffic (hike or snowshoe) must stay to the side of a ski trail, groomed or not.
- While not required, best practice is to keep your dog on leash to keep them off the ski trail and under control. There is nothing worse than having a strange dog bound toward you while you are on skis.
- Annual or day pass is required when visiting the property.
- “Leave the Ice Nice” Climbing on or damaging the ice formations is not allowed. Leave the ice nice for the next visitor.
- Cross country skiing is not allowed on snowmobile trails.
- Fat Tire Bike trails open January 1 - March 15 or until conditions warrant closure. FTB trails are open in the following conditions: frozen ground and temperatures of less than 25 degrees.

Fall Habitat Work

BY JESSE HANEY - POLICE OFFICER/PROPERTY MANAGER

Each fall, our field crew carry out a series of habitat-management projects that set the stage for healthy prairies, woodlands, and trails throughout the coming year. As the growing season winds down, this work becomes especially important. Cooler temperatures reduce stress on plants, many species go dormant, and soil conditions are ideal for practices that improve ecological resilience.



Staff mowed established prairie areas to suppress woody encroachment—a natural process in which shrubs and trees gradually overtake open grasslands. Mowing after plants have gone dormant helps maintain the open structure that native prairie species require. At the same time, mowing helps spread seed from locally adapted native grasses and wildflowers. Fall is an ideal time for this because native prairie seeds need winter stratification—moisture and cold exposure—to germinate naturally in spring. This combination of mowing and subsequent seeding helps improve plant diversity, provides habitat for pollinators, and strengthens long-term prairie health.

The crew mowed fire breaks in preparation for controlled burns planned for spring. Fire breaks are wide, mowed strips that help safely manage prescribed prairie fires. Creating these breaks during fall ensures they are visible, accessible, and ready before fire-weather windows arrive. Prescribed fire is one of the most effective tools for restoring prairies: it recycles nutrients, suppresses invasive species, and stimulates the growth of native plants. Well-maintained fire breaks protect surrounding habitat while allowing land managers to use fire safely and effectively.

Staff also pruned oak trees along trail corridors. Winter is the recommended season for oak pruning because the fungal spores responsible for oak wilt are dormant in cold weather, significantly reducing the risk of infection. By removing weak, diseased, or low-hanging branches during this safe period, staff protect the health of the Reserve’s oak stands and maintain safe, open trails for visitors. Proper pruning helps oaks live longer, remain structurally sound, and resist to disease.

These fall habitat projects reflect the Reserve’s commitment to responsible stewardship and ecological best practices. Visitors may notice some of this work while out hiking, skiing, or exploring this winter—each task supports a healthier, more resilient KVR landscape for years to come.



Winter Recreation Safety in the KVR

BY JESSE HANEY - KVR PROPERTY MANAGER/POLICE OFFICER

As part of my job as a police officer, I've encountered many folks who underestimate the severity of Wisconsin weather. Whether you're hiking, skiing, fat-tire biking, bird watching, hunting, snowmobiling, or simply exploring the KVR, it's important to take steps to protect yourself. Winter is one of the most rewarding times to enjoy the Reserve, but it also brings challenges that demand preparation and respect.

Dressing properly is the foundation of safe winter recreation. Layering your clothing allows you to adjust for effort, temperature, and wind. Start with a moisture-wicking base layer, add insulating layers like fleece or wool, and finish with a windproof, waterproof shell. Good boots are essential—cold feet can end a trip quickly. Choose insulated, waterproof footwear and pair them with quality wool socks. Staying dry is just as important as staying warm; wet clothing accelerates heat loss and increases the risk of hypothermia.

Before heading out, always let someone know your plans. Share where you're going, your intended route, and what time you expect to return. Cell service can be limited in parts of the KVR, and early notification can be crucial in an emergency.

With shorter days this time of year, darkness can arrive quickly. Carry a reliable headlamp or flashlight—even for daytime outings. Snow cover can make trails appear unfamiliar, and fading light makes navigation more difficult. A map, compass, or fully charged GPS unit is strongly recommended.

Winter weather in Wisconsin can change rapidly. Check the forecast before you go but also be prepared for conditions to shift while you're out. High winds, dropping temperatures, or heavy snowfall can create hazards faster than many expect. Packing essentials like extra layers, hand warmers, high-energy snacks, and water (insulated to prevent freezing) can make a significant difference if your trip takes longer than planned. Pay attention to trail conditions. Ice can form beneath snow, making certain slopes or river-adjacent trails hazardous.

There are shared routes on the KVR: portions of the West Ridge Trail, Blackhawk Rock Trail, Dutch Hollow Trail, and Hay Valley Trail are designated snowmobile trails, and while they are open to hiking; be mindful of speed and visibility. It is important to be alert and aware of snowmobile traffic; so please refrain from headphone or earbud use while hiking on these trails. Importantly, skiers are not allowed to use snowmobile trails, and snowmobilers are restricted to designated trails. Winter in the KVR is beautiful, peaceful, and full of adventure. With thoughtful preparation and respect for the elements, you can enjoy the season safely and help ensure that rescues remain rare. Stay warm, stay aware, and have a great winter in the Reserve.



On 8600 Acres



Trail Talk - Celebrate the Snow

BY JACKIE LEIS - KVR NATURAL RESOURCES & RECREATION SPECIALIST

Winter recreation can be dismal without snow. It feels like it has been years since we have been able to properly play in the snow at the KVR. Our groomers have had more idle time than use and we have definitely saved money on ski wax. It is quite refreshing to see snow cover on the ground; a revitalizing blanket the landscape needs.

The absence of a good snow might also cause us to become lax with our winter trail etiquette. Check out the friendly reminders on this page.

The ice formations are just beginning to build. The best time to check out the ice is late January and February. Be sure to "Leave the Ice Nice" when you do visit. Thanks to generous donations from Friends of KVR, and the former Dregne's store in Westby, the KVR maintains a small fleet of snowshoes and cross-country skis for visitors to rent. Stop in the Visitor Center to learn more. [Watch our website for trail status updates and winter recreation information.](#)

Have fun in the snow!





Bridge 18 under the stars

Conservation in Action

GOOD TO KNOW

Half the park is after dark!



[Click here to learn more about
local Dark Sky Conservation](#)

0.12% drop from last year. Of these, 550,611 were for gun-deer privileges alone. Hunters registered 182,084 deer during the season, down 0.8% from 2024. These trends matter: fewer hunters mean reduced conservation funding, fewer volunteer stewards on the landscape, and less of the sustainable harvesting of wildlife which may lead to an adverse balance in the ecosystem.

As we close out this season, I would like to reiterate the importance of lawful regulated hunting and its positive impact on our ecosystems. From its creation, under the joint ownership of the State of Wisconsin and the Ho-Chunk Nation, the KVR was intended to remain open for public hunting and fishing to provide the opportunity for all people to have a place to enjoy and practice safe and ethical sportsmanship.

Hunting on the KVR

BY JESSE HANEY - KVR POLICE OFFICER & PROPERTY MANAGER

Winter is upon us and so is the wrapping up of the Wisconsin gun-deer season. In my position as Police Officer and Property Manager at the Kickapoo Valley Reserve, I have the privilege of working on a landscape and meeting the wide variety of patrons of the Kickapoo Valley Reserve. I always find it interesting to learn about how far people come to enjoy the Reserve and how they learned about it. This hunting season brought many great interactions.

Many years ago, during my initial conservation law-enforcement training, the concept that public lands — and the wildlife on them — belong collectively to the people was central to our emphasis on protecting resources by enforcement of the laws. Under the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation, game is a public resource, managed for the benefit of everyone. Regulated hunting remains one of the most effective tools for maintaining healthy, balanced ecosystems. It is one of the many partnerships between the public and the land itself.



This year, our law-enforcement team's interactions with hunters were overwhelmingly positive. Nearly every contact reflected respect for the rules and appreciation for the Reserve. The few issues we encountered were minor, easily corrected, and often stemmed from simple misunderstandings rather than intentional violations.

Unfortunately, statewide participation continues to decline. According to the Wisconsin DNR's most recent numbers, total 2025 deer-hunting license sales decreased slightly to 790,044 — a



Holiday Happening Cookie Walk

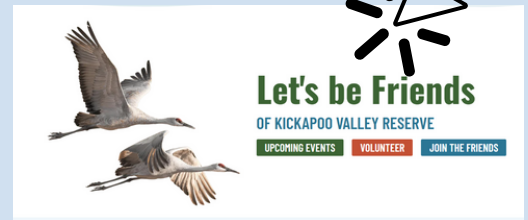
Friends of Kickapoo Valley Reserve Calling Volunteers!

Winter Festival
Concessions
January 10, 2026

Winter Festival
Activities
January 10, 2026

We need you! Click the button to volunteer!

Check out our new website!



Donations & Support

The non-profit Friends of Kickapoo Valley Reserve is an organization of people dedicated to assist the Kickapoo Reserve Management Board in its mission to preserve and protect the lands entrusted to the KVR by raising funds and public awareness, and by providing volunteers for needed projects. Our fundraising efforts take place year-round, ranging from seasonal community events to special activities that support the Kickapoo Valley Reserve. End of the year donations are graciously accepted. Donations help Friends of Kickapoo Valley Reserve, help the Kickapoo Valley Reserve. Donations of any amount are accepted and help to:

- To preserve, protect, restore, and enhance the Kickapoo Valley Reserve's natural, cultural, and historic resources.
- To provide improved services and facilities for visitors to the KVR.
- To increase public conservation awareness and support the KVR.
- To enhance educational and interpretive activities.
- To enhance and maintain sustainable trails and trail facilities.
- To maintain and sustain KVR campsites.

[Find out more about ways to donate and how you can support the Friends of KVR.](#)



Last minute shopping! Shop local and support Friends of KVR



Locally made candles, soap,
honey, maple syrup holiday
ornaments and more!!!



We Celebrated a Festive Holiday Happening



New T-Shirt designs long and short sleeve!



Naturalist Notes

GOOD TO KNOW

“Once in a while... a Pileated Woodpecker gets brave and comes to the suet.”

LEARN MORE HERE



Male Northern Cardinal Photo by Peter Schmidt



A public and private partnership to increase awareness, improve habitat, and engage landowners in conservation practices for birds and other wildlife within the Kickapoo-Wildcat Important Bird Area.

Winter Birding at the Feeder

BY BARBARA DUERKSEN - MASTER NATURALIST & NATIVE BIRD EXPERT

Cardinals, Bluejays, Purple Finches, Black-capped Chickadees, Dark-eyed Juncos, woodpeckers – feeding birds in winter provides color, action, and occasional drama in a sometimes-dreary winter landscape. Winter is a good time to study birds. They are perching nearby and there are fewer birds to sort through, as the insect eaters have flown south.

At our location in northwest Richland County, we primarily feed black oil sunflower seeds and suet, adding peanuts and mealworms when it gets really cold. Regulars are the above species, plus White-breasted Nuthatch, American Goldfinch, Tufted Titmouse, House Sparrow, House Finch and maybe one or two American Tree Sparrows. Woodpeckers, who mostly show up at the suet feeders, are Downy, Red-bellied, and Hairy, although the Hairy Woodpeckers are, in some winters, less likely to show up. Once in a while, a Red-headed Woodpecker makes an appearance, and very occasionally, a Pileated Woodpecker gets brave enough to come to the suet.

Less common are the Red-breasted Nuthatch, Pine Siskin, White-throated Sparrow, and Song Sparrow. This winter there may be an eruption of Redpolls. These are small northern finches that are not normally seen here but come south when their food sources in the tundra and boreal forests are scarce. They are small, streaky brown and white, with short yellow beaks and a small red patch on the forehead. Males show varying amount of pink on the chest and down.

Bird feeders also attract avian predators, most commonly Sharp-shinned and Cooper's Hawks. These two species look similar, but there are size and shape differences. This article is a good place to start working on identification:

<https://www.audubon.org/magazine/beginners-guide-identifying-coopers-and-sharp-shinned-hawks>

Birds that rarely show up at my feeder may be regulars somewhere else. A lot depends on surrounding habitat. Take time to look at each bird in your yard – you might be surprised to find a late migrant or a bird that has wandered from its usual wintering area.

Recommended Birding Resources:

- Cornell Laboratory for Ornithology's Project Feeder Watch has advice on feeders, where to put them, keeping them clean, what to feed birds, and much more. Do a search for "Project Feeder Watch Feeding Birds".
- allaboutbirds.org is a good site for identification help, i.e. distinguishing Purple Finches from House Finches.
- Avian Flu is an ongoing concern. See <https://www.allaboutbirds.org/news/avian-influenza-outbreak-should-you-take-down-your-bird-feeders/>

To Feed or Not Feed the Birds

BY CATHY CHYBOWSKI - KVR INSTRUCTOR/NATURALIST

That age-old question pops up periodically: does feeding birds do more harm than good? Years ago a study conducted during winter in Wisconsin showed that Black-capped Chickadees with access to birdseed had a much higher overwinter survival rate (69%) compared to those without access to seed (37%). The majority of studies show a positive effect of feeding. Feeding brings birds close together, potentially increasing the spread of disease.

Occasionally a hawk or other raptor takes advantage of an easy meal (but of course it has to eat too). And if feeders are not located properly it can result in collisions with windows. But in the winter when food is in short supply, and birds burn more calories to keep warm in addition to fueling their daily activity, it seems like the right thing to do. Nearly 50% of U.S. households feed backyard birds, and feeding can provide an enjoyable way to interact with nature. It is a learning opportunity and can increase one's knowledge of bird identification and behavior as well as providing a sense of stewardship.

According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, feeders should be placed within three feet of windows so that birds cannot gain enough speed to cause serious injury by flying into the window. Placing a feeder 15-30' from a window poses the greatest hazard, but there are many ways to make windows "bird friendly." Locating the feeder close to shrubs or trees will offer birds safety from predators and shelter from wind. Cats pose a serious threat to birds; if they are present, rethink feeding birds. Installing wild bird feeding stations away from chickens and ducks can reduce the potential of disease spread. Sometimes it is possible to create habitat for birds by planting native perennials, shrubs, and trees that produce fruits and seeds and attract beneficial insects. Foods high in fat like suet, peanut butter, peanuts, and black oil sunflower seed give birds the biggest energy boost. Suet can be offered in onion bags or wire or dowel cages. Peanut butter can be fed on logs with holes drilled in them or a pinecone dipped into it. Other seeds include striped sunflower, safflower, millet scattered on the ground for juncos, mourning doves and tree sparrows, thistle seed for goldfinches, house and purple finches, redpolls and pine siskins. Spreading shelled corn on the ground attracts pheasants, turkeys, squirrels and rabbits. Mealworms are high in protein and fat and are especially attractive to chickadees, bluebirds, titmice and woodpeckers.

There are other responsibilities involved in feeding birds. Watch feeders for sick-looking birds and if present take down feeders for a time. Regularly cleaning the feeders once every two weeks or so to reduce the risk of disease is important. Two ounces of bleach in one gallon of water is the recommendation, then let the feeder dry in the sun. Bacteria and mold can grow on wet seeds under the feeder so raking up and disposing of this can prevent sick birds. Leaving seed-bearing plants standing and postponing garden cleanup until spring provides food and shelter for birds toughing it out over the winter.

Naturalist Notes

GOOD TO KNOW

Learn more about
birds here

[LEARN MORE HERE](#)



Sharp-shinned Hawk Photo by Peter Schmidt



Volunteer Spotlight

ADOPT A TRAIL

BY JESSE HANEY - POLICE OFFICER & PROPERTY MANAGER

The Adopt-A-Trail Program is a partnership between KVR staff and community members who care deeply about this special place. Volunteers “adopt” a section of trail and take responsibility for monitoring its condition, reporting issues, and performing light maintenance. Tasks may include clearing brush, pruning branches, removing litter, or checking for hazards. KVR provides training, resources, and ongoing support. Even a few hours a year makes a lasting difference. Maintaining trails is about more than keeping paths clear. It’s about protecting the environment, preserving cultural and natural resources, and ensuring that every visitor has a safe and positive experience. By adopting a trail, volunteers take pride in being stewards of the land and contributing directly to the long-term preservation of the Reserve. One of the most inspiring aspects of the program is the variety of people who participate. Some adopters treat it as a way to spend more time outdoors, while others see it as an opportunity to teach young people about stewardship and responsibility. Yet all share a common goal: keeping the Reserve accessible, healthy, and thriving. We are working on updating Adopt-A-Trail signage to better recognize the dedicated volunteers who give their time and energy. Recognition is a small gesture of thanks, but the real reward comes from knowing you’re making a meaningful contribution to an irreplaceable landscape.

Wisconsin Master Naturalist

BY AMY DVORAK - ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT & KVR WI MASTER NATURALIST COORDINATOR

WISCONSIN
Master Naturalist



Since 2012, the Wisconsin Master Naturalist program has been supporting volunteers and instructors in promoting stewardship, awareness, and understanding of the natural environment. These volunteers and instructors become Master Naturalists by completing 40 hours of in-person, hands-on training on topics such as natural history, human connections, geology, and wildlife. Participants also complete a small project to try out volunteer activities.



People become Master Naturalists for a variety of reasons. Some want to learn more about the local environment, some want to spend time outside, and others want to meet people with similar interests. Whatever your reason, it’s well worth it! Local organizations also appreciate Master Naturalists. You’ll be called on to lead volunteer groups, speak at events, or create your own citizen science project.

The Kickapoo Valley Reserve is no stranger to this program. In 2015 and 2020, we held Master Naturalist trainings, and we are scheduled to hold another in 2026. The training will take place from April to September in order to cover the phenological changes. Some of the graduates of our past trainings are now instructors for our education programs, including the next Master Naturalist training!

Interested in participating? Visit the [Wisconsin Master Naturalist website](#) to learn more and to register.



If you are interested in joining the program or would like more information, please contact the [Kickapoo Valley Reserve](#). Together, we can ensure trails remain open, safe, and beautiful for all who come to enjoy them.



Winter Festival

Saturday, January 10, 2026

Kickapoo Valley Reserve

Visitor Center

Everyone is welcome! Admission is free! Bundle up and join us!



Creative Communities CANVAS PROJECT

Canvases will be available beginning January 2, 2026.

Watch for details about the
Ephemeral Art Series to be held
Mondays in March!



GUIDED ICE HIKES

Stroll to the Ice
Saturday,
February 21, 2026

The Trek
Saturday,
February 28, 2026



What's Happening

The Visitor Center will be
closed
December 24-25, 2025, and
December 31 - January 1,
2026 so staff can enjoy time
with their families.

Please be sure to get your
pass online during that time if
you plan to visit.

Have a safe and Happy
Holidays and cheers to the
New Year!

Driftless Dialogue Lecture Series



Raptors - Winter Hunters

Meet fireside & learn about the how
raptors thrive in winter and meet the
live birds at Winter Festival!

Presenter: River Valley Raptors

Date: January 10, 2026

Time: 11am & 2pm

Location: KVR Visitor Center



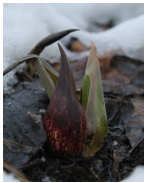


Fall trail on the KVR - Jackie Leis

BY CATHY CHYBOWSKI -
NATURALIST & KVR INSTRUCTOR

The winter solstice is the shortest day of the year and the astronomical beginning of winter. Since the behavior of many plants and animals depends on day length and temperature, behaviors such as finding a winter den, migrating, flowering and nesting occur seasonally. We call these phenological events. When recorded accurately and consistently over time, these records indicate changes in nature including the weather. Aldo Leopold and his daughter Nina Leopold Bradley have become widely known for the phenology work they have done over the past decades.

By the end of February, great horned owls and bald eagles have claimed territories and are nesting, white-tailed deer are shedding antlers, cardinals and chickadees are singing their spring songs, and many mammals including wolves, squirrels, red foxes, coyotes and bobcats are mating. By mid-November black bears (*Ursus americanus*) enter a period of dormancy sometimes called hibernation, though it is not considered a true hibernator like the woodchuck. After a feeding frenzy in late summer and fall, black bears put on a thick layer of fat and then enter their winter den. But an extended warm fall like we just experienced can delay this. While in the den, the sow has her cubs which do not hibernate either. This period of dormancy continues until March or April though black bears have been known to emerge briefly during a January thaw.



The skunk cabbage (*Symplocarpus foetidus*) is a unique plant that can be found near woodland streams or ephemeral ponds. The buds and flowers actually emerge in the fall, but few people notice. Sometime in February, when snow still blankets the ground, the flower buds enlarge and the plant produces heat through respiration melting the surrounding snow. This unusual plant, a member of the Arum family, is related to jack-in-the-pulpit and relies on flies and honeybees for its pollination.

Few insects overwinter as adults, but the snow flea (*Hypogastrura nivicola*) is a master of it. In a winter landscape where it is best to be big and white, the snow flea is neither. It is also cold-blooded and wingless. This tiny insect, less than 1/10" long, hops along on its tail, folded under its belly. This leaping behavior gives it a second name—springtail. It produces an antifreeze protein that prevents ice crystals from forming inside its body. On days above freezing, look for them on top of the snow at the base of a tree. It will look as if pepper were sprinkled over the snow. It is not a flea, it is harmless, and in fact it is beneficial, helping to break down organic matter.



Officer Malanka Retiring

BY: JASON LEIS- KVR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



L to R KVR Officers Haney, Malanka and Leis

Many of you know Chris who has worked for the Kickapoo Valley Reserve Police and has been a friendly face greeting visitors since 2021. I first learned of Chris through his late father-in-law, Bill Welk, who I taught hunters safety with for many years. At the time, Chris and Bill's daughter Cara were moving back to the area once Chris retired from his Police Chief duties in Colorado. I got connected with Chris and learned he had a long career in law enforcement, starting with National Park duties, then 25 years with the Austin Texas Police Department, followed by 5 years as the Police Chief in Idaho Springs, Colorado. Chris shared he was interested in finishing out his career similar to how it started, protecting natural resources.

Chris quickly became an asset to the Kickapoo Valley Reserve and brought a wealth of experiences that benefited all who worked with him. He enjoys talking with visitors of the KVR and helping wherever he can. I appreciate all the policy work he has done for the KVR Police and for working through situations together with myself and other officers. We will definitely miss having Chris around, but he assures me he won't be far away and will be volunteering his time in the future. Chris' last day to work is Saturday, January 10, 2026, the KVR Winter Festival. Please stop in and let him know you appreciate his service.

Thank you, Chris, for being a valued member of the KVR team and a good friend as well.



La Farge Fire Demonstration at Winter Festival

WINTER FESTIVAL

Saturday, January 10, 2026
10AM - 4PM AND BEYOND

Kickapoo Valley Reserve
La Farge, WI

- * 5K Resolution Run/Walk
- * Meet the Raptors - Live Birds
- * Chili and Bread Contest
- * Horse Drawn Sleigh Rides
- * Winter Sports Demos
- * Indigenous Games
- * Concessions
- * Silent Auction
- * Raffle & More!

**FREE ADMISSION
EVERYONE WELCOME!**

www.kickapoovalley.gov

Activities subject to change due to weather conditions.

January 10, 2025



5K Resolution Run/Walk



Hiking with Llamas



Fireside Talks



Sled Dogs



Photo by KVR

Participate in these great contests during Winter Festival!

Celebrate yourself and your health and start 2026 with


Winter Festival Resolution Run 5K RUN & WALK

**SATURDAY
JANUARY 10, 2026
9AM**

Kickapoo Valley Reserve
S3661 State Road 131
La Farge, WI 54639
KICKAPOOVALLEY.WI.US
Registration & Donations Appreciated

Sponsored by:



 5K Resolution Run/Walk



"Best Dam Chili in the Kickapoo Valley"




Chili & Bread Contest

Saturday, January 10, 2026

by La Farge Lions Club
at Kickapoo Valley Reserve
Winter Festival



TO ENTER
kickapoovalley.wi.gov

Chili and Bread Contest 

Support Winter Festival!

Volunteer at Winter
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Donate to
Silent Auction 