

**Kickapoo Reserve Management Board
Meeting Minutes for August 20, 2026**
Kickapoo Valley Reserve Visitor Center

Board members present: Dan Catherman, Scott Lind (via Zoom), Bill Quackenbush, Kelly Rueckheim, Barb Sarnowski, Damian Thundercloud, Lyndsey Winchel, Luke Zahm

Board members absent: Kjetil Garvin, Reggie Nelson

Staff members present: Jason Leis, Amy Dvorak, Jesse Haney

Others in attendance: Christian Malanka, Jen Oium, Emily Schendel (via Zoom), Kristina Ralph (via Zoom)

Vice-Chair Thundercloud called the meeting to order at 6:01 p.m.

Catherman made a motion to approve the agenda, and Zahm seconded. The motion passed with all ayes.

Thundercloud read the Land Acknowledgement Statement.

Leis confirmed the agenda was properly posted.

Quackenbush motioned to approve the minutes from the July 2026 meeting. Zahm seconded the motion. Winchel requested amendments. Quackenbush motioned to approve the amended minutes, and Zahm seconded. The motion passed with all ayes.

Board Election of Chairperson:

Zahm nominated Quackenbush as Chair, and Quackenbush declined. Quackenbush nominated Thundercloud, and Thundercloud accepted the nomination. Zahm seconded the nomination, and Thundercloud was voted as Chair with all ayes.

Thundercloud nominated Quackenbush for Vice-Chair, and Quackenbush accepted. Catherman moved to close the nominations, and Zahm seconded. Quackenbush was voted as Vice-Chair with all ayes.

Chairperson and/or Executive Director report:

Unintentionally skipped by Thundercloud.

Friends of KVR Update:

None.

Public appearances:

Christian Malanka spoke on the topic of the two outdoor classrooms. He said it is clear what the KRMB can legally do with the buildings. He requested the board rescind any ad hoc committee formation and refocus its energy onto the goals and mission of preserving and protecting the

Kickapoo Valley Reserve and the ancestral lands of its native peoples. Malanka said the Board should pass the decision of what to do with the buildings onto the La Farge School District.

Budget Report:

Leis said we asked for two additional LTE positions to do land management work. Since it was submitted, there have been discussions about changing those to full-time positions. He said it is not too late to change it. Leis said there are no current budget reports as the financial administrators are busy with next year's budget.

Formation of Ad Hoc Committee:

Eleven people contacted prior-Chair Travis Downing by July 30, 2026 indicating a desire to be on the committee.

Winchel said the Fleckenstein Family Foundation did not reach out to Downing prior to the deadline. She said Downing did not contact the family. There are four KRMB members, two Kickapoo Valley Forest School (KVFS) staff, one KVFS parent, a Friends of KVR officer, and three staff members. Winchel does not believe seats on the committee should not be filled by staff members. She disagreed with adding two additional seats. Winchel said the purpose of the committee is to bring outside input. Winchel said, "It is common practice that these committees have, that all the subcommittees have a staff member there and the executive director, but it is not, the seats are not filled by staff."

Catherman asked if the ad hoc committee was necessary. He said the Board is spinning their wheels in the mud. There are a lot of other things at the KVR that need attention. Catherman said if the La Farge School District could take lead, he would like to give it to them. Thundercloud said because the buildings are owned by the State of Wisconsin, the school could not make any decisions on the buildings.

Rueckheim asked if they could add two people to the committee, making it 13 instead of 11 members. Winchel requested only one staff member on the committee. Quackenbush agreed it should be increased to 13 members since the staff members who applied did so by the deadline.

Catherman made a motion to increase the number of committee members from 11 to 13, and Sarnowski seconded. The motion passed with seven ayes and one opposed (Winchel).

The first meeting was scheduled for September 14, 2026, at 6:00 p.m. at the Kickapoo Valley Reserve Visitor Center. Thundercloud asked Winchel to contact all 13 members to let them know about the meeting, and she said she would do that.

Zahm said he would be willing to be the chair of the committee. Thundercloud appointed Zahm as chair of the ad hoc committee.

It was decided the first meeting would be a planning meeting.

Update on Biennial Budget Process:

Leis sent in documents requested by the fiscal team including the description of the Reserve. He said he is working on what is being requested over the typical budget increase. Leis said we want more in the law enforcement appropriation, but he was told to ask for more land management staff since Jesse Haney's position is more focused on law enforcement. He said two more LTE positions were requested for land management projects. The justification is that Haney's position spends more time on law enforcement.

Leis said he and Thundercloud talked about why we ask for part-time positions rather than full-time positions. Adding two full-time positions would significantly increase the budget. Leis asked what the Board would like to see: two full-time positions, one full-time position and a couple part-time positions, or only two part-time positions. He said the deadline to send the request to the State of Wisconsin is September 15, 2026.

A discussion ensued regarding the budget process.

Thundercloud asked Leis how many land management laborers are needed. Leis said two full-time positions, including a forester. Thundercloud asked if the KVR could use an extra LTE position in the summer. Leis said yes. Board members discussed how many positions Leis should ask for and what those positions would do. It was decided to ask for three positions.

Rueckheim made a motion to request three positions, and Catherman seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Thundercloud asked if there was anything else to add to the budget that is over the usual budget request. Leis said we will need a new vehicle as the current vehicle lease will end soon. There were questions about getting a state-owned vehicle. Leis explained it is unlikely to get a state-owned vehicle based on the number of vehicles available that match the needs of the KVR.

Winchel asked for an education and tourism budget. Leis explained there is a presentation of the budget for each event. He said we could provide a financial report for the various education programs. The education programs are supposed to be self-sustaining, and there has never been a stand-alone education budget.

Winchel discussed the possibility of updating the KVR website. Leis said he put in a request to the Department of Enterprise Technology to redo the website. He said the DET will provide a cost if they can redo the website, and if they can't redo the website, they can host it and someone else builds it, or we can find someone else to host it and build it. Leis requested a breakdown of the costs associated with managing our current website, and he has not received that information yet.

Leis said the heat pumps need to be replaced at the Visitor Center. Leis said the heat pump in the garage was replaced recently, and it was \$14,000. We need seven more. Thundercloud recommended putting the heat pumps in the budget. Leis said he did. The roof project has been put out for bids. The garage and Visitor Center roofs have been split into two projects so the bids stay under \$100,000 for each project.

Leis acknowledged the Friends of KVR for holding a staff appreciation party the previous evening. He said we have a great team at the KVR, probably one of the best since he started here. He thanked everyone for doing a great job.

Zahm asked if he could reach out to Colleen Holtan to get a fee breakdown of the shared services agreements. He said he would share her response with Leis and the executive committee.

Quackenbush asked when the fee schedule is reviewed. Leis said the board sets fees in December for the next year.

Winchel expressed concern that the Board did not see a budget proposal before being asked to approve positions and they would not see it before the deadline.

Discussion of Education Buildings:

None.

Update on land trade with Vernel Vesbach:

Leis said he called Attorney Nathan Judnic. He has all of the information, such as the surveys and assessments. Attorney Judnic said he would do better at working on this. Thundercloud requested to copy the executive committee on all emails to Attorney Judnic on this topic.

Hiring update:

The education coordinator position was reposted again, and the deadline is September 3, 2026. Sarnowski said the applicants would be good for other positions but not the education coordinator. Thundercloud asked where the job is posted. Leis said Indeed, X, Facebook, Instagram, Wisc.Jobs, a technical college job posting website, and additional places. Winchel asked if the job posting was updated because it is listed as KRMB Education Coordinator.

Thundercloud asked if the Board could make changes to job descriptions. Leis said he usually handles it, not the Board.

Thundercloud made a motion for the executive director, Jason Leis, to reach out to Nathan Draeger to make sure the job is posted correctly on the website including the job title and job category. Quackenbush seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Education and Tourism Committee:

Sarnowski reviewed the meeting from August 6, 2026. Summer camp was well attended and well received. The Wisconsin Master Naturalist training has one session left. Driftless Dialogue is scheduled for the next few months. The fall semester of Nature Bound is starting in September.

The campsite reservation system is working well. Dam Challenge is scheduled for October 3, 2026 with the Friends of KVR pasta supper the night before. The committee discussed the current KVR website and whether we try to patch it up or create a new one.

The committee will look at future marketing approaches. The December meeting will be a good time to focus on that topic.

The next Education and Tourism Committee meeting is scheduled for October 8, 2026, at 5:30 p.m. at the Kickapoo Valley Reserve Visitor Center.

Finance Committee:

There has been no committee meeting since the July 2026 board meeting.

The next Finance Committee meeting is scheduled for September 14, 2026, at 9:00 a.m. at the Kickapoo Valley Reserve Visitor Center.

Land Management Committee:

There has been no committee meeting since the July 2026 board meeting.

Quackenbush nominated Lind as Chair of the committee, and Lind declined.

Quackenbush nominated Thundercloud as Chair of the committee, and Thundercloud accepted. Catherman seconded the nomination.

The next Land Management Committee meeting is scheduled for September 8, 2026, at 5:30 p.m. at the Kickapoo Valley Reserve Visitor Center.

Board Member Matters:

Lind said the second Natural Resources Foundation field trip for the Kickapoo Valley Dark Sky Initiative is happening September 10, 2026. There were 16 attendees in May, and there are 36 registered for this field trip.

Zahm said he was appointed by the Governor to the Wild Rice Sustainability Council. Kjetil Garvin sits on the council. Wild Rice Week in Wisconsin is planned for September 4, 2026. September 11 is the Midwest Wild Food Festival in Madison.

Quackenbush said there is an upcoming opportunity to participate in a land manager workshop on October 6 & 7, 2026 in Galena, Illinois with the Joe Daviess Conservation Foundation to begin discussing different aspects of environmental and cultural land management practices. He said they have extended an invitation to the Board and/or KVR staff. Haney said he cannot attend due to an invasive species conference he is attending those days. Thundercloud said he would like to attend. Quackenbush will get the contact information to everyone.

Quackenbush said a new group established a greenhouse in Barrington, Illinois that focuses on environmental practices of collecting plants and doing seed exchanges. They reached out to the Ho-Chunk Nation to create a shared seed database. They have plans for indigenous youth to work there. They are looking for cultural expertise on what plants are needed on Ho-Chunk Nation lands. Quackenbush suggested inviting them to present their program to the KVR.

Quackenbush said the executive director of the Wisconsin Historical Society, Christian Overland, came to the KVR today. Overland asked Leis if the liaison between the Wisconsin Historical Society and KVR had been to any meetings. He said their liaison would reach out to Leis to

schedule a time to come to the Board meetings. Thundercloud said he would try to get Ryan Greendeer, the Ho-Chunk Nation liaison, to come to a meeting.

Zahm said he met with the CEO of Whole Foods. They have an initiative where they have money to put into places that are advocating for biodiversity and pollinator habitat. He asked the CEO for \$86,000 per year in supplements which would cover the agricultural leases we have or if we could be considered for a pilot program. He will share as he hears more.

Request for future agenda topics:

Thundercloud requested to discuss the meeting format, agenda format, and board meeting packets. Leis said a change in the agenda format requires a change of the Board Operating Procedures.

Closed session:

Thundercloud made a motion to convene into closed session pursuant to Wis. Stat. 19.185(1)(c): Considering employment, promotion, compensation, or performance data of any public employee over which the governmental body has jurisdiction or exercises responsibility with the purpose for discussion of personnel and employment issues. Zahm seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Lind made a motion to reconvene into open session, and Sarnowski seconded. The motion passed with all ayes.

Adjournment:

Sarnowski made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Catherman seconded, and it passed unanimously with all ayes. The meeting adjourned at 8:35 p.m.

The next meeting is scheduled for September 17, 2026, at 6:00 p.m. at the Kickapoo Valley Reserve Visitor Center.

Minutes transcribed by Amy Dvorak, Executive Assistant