

2026-2030 Education Management Plan

Land Acknowledgement Statement

The Kickapoo Reserve Management Board acknowledges that the state and federal lands that comprise the Reserve fall within the ancestral homelands of First Nations people including the Hoocąk Nation. We recognize the sovereignty of the Hoocąk and other First Nations and will work towards a shared future by continuing to create collaborative opportunities to protect and preserve these lands.

Our Mission

The land in the Kickapoo Valley Reserve shall be protected, preserved, and enhanced so that its unique environmental, scenic, and cultural features provide opportunities for the use and enjoyment of visitors to the Reserve. The Reserve will be promoted as a unique example of the Driftless Area Ecoregion and as a destination for low-impact tourism and education.

Introduction

The Kickapoo Valley Reserve (KVR) is 8,600 acres of timeless wisdom and lessons to share with any student wishing to learn. The goal of the KVR Education Program is to protect and preserve this classroom wilderness through informing and inspiring students of all ages to continue this mission.

Ongoing programs include:

- Education programs for all ages
- Citizen Science education
- Instructor recruitment and retention

Unforeseen events including the COVID-19 pandemic and several staff transitions impacted the implementation of the 2021-2025 Education Master Plan. Despite these challenges, each of the high priority goals were achieved:

- Support was provided to the Kickapoo Valley Forest School with staff sharing and KVR appointed members serving on the Governance Council for two years as well as rental space provided for four years.
- Two classroom buildings were established in support of the Kickapoo Valley Forest School and Kickapoo Valley Reserve programs. With the Friends of Kickapoo Valley Reserve overseeing receiving and disbursing funds, more than \$330,000 was raised for the projects with an additional 2,142 volunteer hours going into the construction efforts. Prairie Springs 1 was completed and in use in August 2021. Prairie Springs 2 was constructed and in use in November 2023.
- The Visitor Center Exhibit upgrade was completed in 2022 and included the addition of Ho-Chunk language translations and a Dark Sky area.

As a response to the pandemic, these outdoor program areas were added:

- The Pollinator Paragon garden was planted in 2023 to highlight the importance of prairies and how they impact pollinators. The project includes the small garden area behind the Visitor Center with several marked native perennial flowers as well as a presentation available inside the Visitor Center with slides highlighting the plants and pollinators.
- A Monarch Nursery was built to protect Monarchs collected from at-risk areas. Visitors were provided with educational materials and the ability to watch them transition from egg to larva (caterpillar) to pupa (chrysalis) to adult (butterfly) and released.
- A Little Free Library was established outside the Visitor Center.

In addition, a Land Acknowledgement Statement was written and incorporated into written communications and events. The Waterways summer camp was also added to offer teens an overnight camp experience that included canoeing on the Kickapoo River.

2026-2030 Education Management Plan Objectives and Implementation Strategies

1. Promote mission-driven programming for all ages and abilities. Priority: High
 - Incorporate adaptive programming from current curriculum.
 - Encourage multi-season educational programming.
 - Develop weather and climate curriculum.
 - Expand Dark Sky programs for all ages.
 - Establish and support family-focused education programs.
 - Facilitate adult education programs, such as Wisconsin Master Naturalist Course.

2. Strengthen and support education instructor pool. Priority: High
 - Identify recruitment obstacles and ways to overcome them.
 - Support instructors through training, communication and community building.

3. Prioritize use of education spaces for the Reserve's education programs. Priority: High
 - Create reservation policies for spaces to ensure Reserve programs have space available for use.
 - Develop public rental policies for education spaces.

4. Incorporate available classrooms into education programming. Priority: High
 - Develop a science & research lab with accompanying curriculum.
 - Engage with researchers, experts, and professionals to identify and carry out field research on the KVR.

5. Monitor and manage impacts to outdoor spaces used by education groups. Priority: Medium
 - Anticipate programming impacts to outdoor spaces based on expected conditions and uses.
 - Routinely check used spaces to monitor impacts.
 - Act to preserve and protect impacted spaces.
 - Collect data and develop an ongoing matrix to monitor impacts.

6. Maintain and update exhibits ensuring mission-focused presentation. Priority: Medium
 - Keep information current and relevant.
 - Consider adding new exhibits, such as a root depth display to illustrate invasive vs native root systems.