

Kickapoo Valley Reserve Land Management Plan 2026-2030

Resource Overview

CULTURAL RESOURCES

Over 500 known archeological sites on the property of such significance generated the designation as the Upper Kickapoo Valley Prehistoric Archeological District, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. As outlined in the Memorandum of Understanding (1997) and Cultural Resources Management Plan, all Land Management projects must first consider potential impact to cultural sites prior to determining feasibility. As the property becomes more popular and the public explores areas they may not know are sacred, the KRMB will need to consider additional efforts to protect them. In addition, updated documentation of sites may be needed as natural forces reduce their distinct features such as marker trees and petroglyphs. More information on Cultural Resources can be found in the Cultural Resource Management Plan.

Furthermore, in 1975, the National Park Service National Natural Landmark Program designated portions of the Kickapoo Valley Reserve as the [Kickapoo River Natural Area](#).

EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

The Kickapoo Valley Reserve offers a variety of immersive, hands-on nature-based learning opportunities for all ages that promote positive environmental values.

The Visitor Center offers interactive museum exhibits as well as classroom space, but some of the most exciting learning happens on the trails and in the woods of our almost 8,600 acres of outdoor “classroom” space! The KVR provides structured hands-on nature education year-round. Programs include Saturday and evening public programs, school field trip trips, and summer day camps for pre-K through high school students.



NATURAL RESOURCES

The exceptional value of natural resources in this portion of the Driftless Area is gaining recognition through research projects, media attention, and general awareness. A great deal of work has been done to inventory the diverse flora and fauna of the Reserve. Over 400 plant species and more than 100 species of nesting birds have been documented. Educational brochures with a checklist of species were revised in 2016 for use by learners and explorers of all ages. The resources of the reserve shall be managed to promote, preserve and enhance its unique natural scenic and cultural features. The intent of the Reserve is to conserve, restore, and maintain the ecology and biodiversity of the Kickapoo Valley Reserve, while balancing access and recreation for visitors.

DARK SKY CONSERVATION

Kickapoo Valley Reserve strongly encourages dark sky conservation. Dark skies are imperative for the health of the ecosystem and humans alike. There are no lighting fixtures on the property except for at the Visitor Center and the KVR maintenance building. Lighting at the buildings is dark sky compliant and a good example of responsible lighting that promotes dark sky conservation while providing the necessary lighting for public safety. In cooperation with Wildcat Mountain State Park and Mississippi Valley Conservancy, there are 13000 localized acres of that are protected from light trespass.



HABITAT DIVERSITY

Valley bottoms, former grazed land or farmland have become prairie plantings through significant efforts of the KVR and Ho-Chunk Nation staff. Maintenance and enhanced diversity require prescribed burns, invasive species control, and supplemental seeding. In addition, fragments of goat prairies that remain where agriculture did not previously impact vegetation should earn special attention for the unique and historic vegetation they sustain.

With focus on enhancing pollinator habitat has increased the acreage dedicated to the protection of all pollinators, with special considerations to the threatened monarch butterfly and endangered rusty patch bumblebee.

NATURAL RESOURCES

PRAIRIES AND POLLINATORS

Many open areas of the Reserve are former agricultural fields. The Land Management Plan intends to maintain these as open areas. Native grass plantings and pollinator habitat plantings include over 300 acres. The Ho-Chunk Nation, Friends of Kickapoo Valley Reserve, Prairie Enthusiasts, Department of Natural Resources Turkey Stamp Fund, and Wisconsin Department of Transportation have assisted in these habitat projects.

STATE NATURAL AREAS

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources designated approximate 3,600 acres of the Kickapoo Valley Reserve as [State Natural Areas \(pdf\)](#), best reflecting the natural plant and animal communities that occupied the state in the mid-1800s. These areas have seen little human disturbance, thus serving as important resources for biological and genetic diversity. State Natural Areas are devoted to scientific research and have valuable educational potential.

WATER

The dendritic pattern of tributaries to the Kickapoo River is fully displayed throughout the Reserve. Flowing springs connect with creeks and streams to feed into the river. Wetlands and ponds are spring fed and add to the diversity. Free flowing artesian wells are present at some of the former homestead locations. These wells provide access for monitoring and long-term tracking of groundwater flow rates. Streambank stabilization and connection to the floodplain, such as the five phases of the Weister Creek project, have evolved to incorporate flood resiliency strategies, as well as habitat improvement for non-game species and reptiles and amphibians, in addition to the trout. Flood resiliency and water quality will continue to drive many of the projects on the Reserve in the future as storms are trending with increased intensity and rainfall (See References: Monroe County Change Task Force). Efforts to mitigate damage from the flash floods through constructed wetlands or deep-rooted native grasses will serve as demonstration sites for best practice education and research.

NATURAL RESOURCES

WOODLANDS

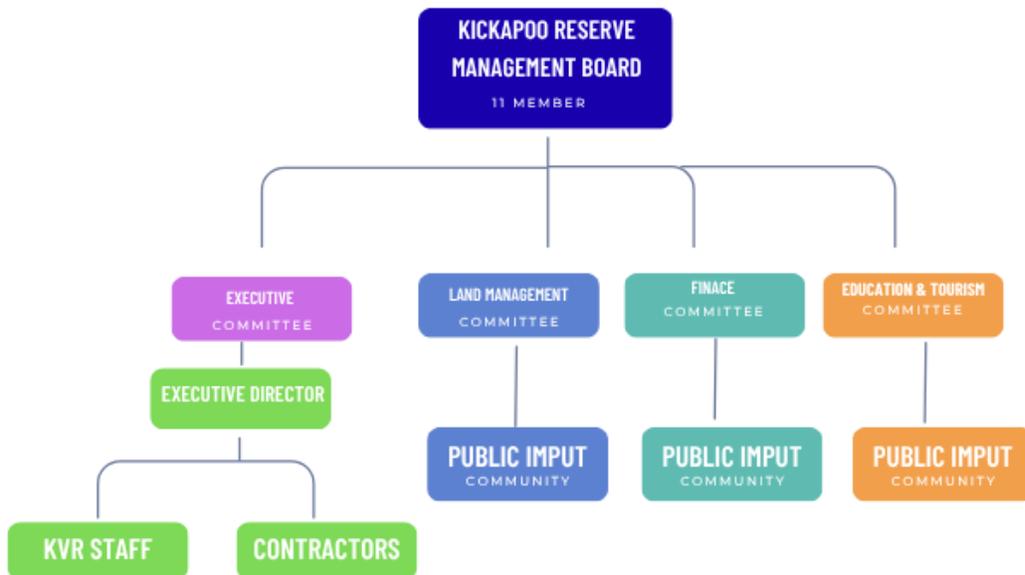
Revered by foresters and ecologists alike, the large blocks or contiguous acres of mixed hardwoods are vitally important to the rich biodiversity within the Reserve. Holistic conservation efforts continue to enhance the health of the forests through pine plantation harvests, invasive species control, and timber stand improvement through regeneration and tree plantings.

Restoration following harvests is labor intensive but vital to the long-term success of the health of the ecosystem.



OPERATIONAL RESOURCES

KICKAPOO VALLEY RESERVE MANAGEMENT CHART



OPERATIONAL RESOURCES

FINANCIAL RESOURCES

The Kickapoo Valley Reserve primarily gets its funding for Land Management projects through user fees, ag leases, grants, donations and budgeted appropriations from the Conservation Fund. Unlike other state agencies, the user fees that are charged stay here on the property to fund our projects. These user fees include camping permits, day use and annual fees, parking permits, room rentals and any other special event permits. Another important source is from ag lease payments. The KVR leases out about 681 acres of fields to local farmers. Grants and donations have helped fund many of our projects as well and we are always looking for grants to continue this important work. In addition, the funds appropriated from the State of WI to the KVR from the Conservation Fund are used for Land Management projects as well.

Project and program support also comes from Friends of Kickapoo Valley Reserve, which is a non-profit organization of people dedicated to assisting the KVR Management Board in its mission to preserve and protect the lands entrusted to the Reserve by raising funds and public awareness, and by providing volunteers for needed projects.

HUMAN RESOURCES

Staffing consists of a permanent, full-time equivalent Property Manager/Police Officer whose position is 45 % Property Management and 55% Law Enforcement. The field crew also consists of Limited Term Employees (up to 1040 hours per year) including: Natural Resource/ Recreation Technician, Grounds Crew Lead and Laborers. At times, interns and volunteers assist as well. Supervision of staff is through the Executive Director. Funding support is through a combination of the Conservation Fund in the base allocation, Tribal Gaming appropriation for the enforcement expenses, and revenue generated from user fees, agriculture leases and timber harvests.

Friends of Kickapoo Valley Reserve also provide and support volunteer opportunities on the KVR.

RECREATIONAL RESOURCES

The Reserve offers a variety of recreation: fishing and hunting; horseback, biking and hiking; cross-country skiing and snowshoeing; and camping and canoeing. Motorized vehicles are not allowed on the Reserve trails (except for snowmobiles in the appropriate season).

Horseback and biking trails are open May 1 - November 15, weather permitting. Hiking is available year-round. All visitors are required to purchase a permit. Permits are available at the Reserve Visitor Center and [online here](#). You can also download an annual visitor permit application form that can be completed and mailed. Please note that trails may be closed at short notice due to wet conditions. Pets must be on a leash from April 1 through July 31, to protect birds nesting. During all other times, pets must be under voice control and polite.

TOURISM AND EVENTS

The Kickapoo Valley Reserve hosts a wide range of events throughout the year.

Annual events are fun ways to help raise money for the education program. There are events for the athlete within you and the KVR Winter Festival is fun for all ages.

Occasional workshops, hikes and presentations provide opportunities to learn about arts, nature and local history. The Ralph Nuzum Driftless Dialogue Lecture series is an almost monthly lecture covering a wide range of topics for the Kickapoo Valley.



TRAILS AND CAMPING

There are over 50 miles of non-motorized trails on the Kickapoo Valley Reserve. The KVR maintains 15 Kickapoo River miles of water trail for canoeing and kayaking. The use of tubes for floating has been implemented by local liveries in the past few years.

There are 33 primitive campsites on the KVR. 23 vehicle accessible sites and 10 non-vehicle accessible sites. Camping is allowed in designated sites only.

LAND MANAGEMENT OVERVIEW

Established Conservation Policies

Agriculture

668 cropland acres are leased to area farmers. Lease agreements are set on a six-year cycle, designed to encourage the best conservation methods in crop rotation and soil health. Additional safeguards, including requirements for buffer strips along waterways and restrictions on manure spreading are intended to protect the resource. Leasing land is beneficial to the reserve as a revenue source and requires minimum maintenance. In 2022 the KRMB adopted a policy restricting the use of Neonicotinoid treated seeds on the property.

Dark Sky Conservation

Outdoor lighting at the Reserve is nearly exclusively LED sources using an 1800K (Kelvin) color temperature and dimmed to the standards set by the Illuminating Engineering Society to have minimum negative environmental impacts. Original fixtures consisted of a mixture of 5000K LEDs (the bollard lights) and 4200K Metal Halide bulbs in the parking lot and wall mounted lights. The zero-uplight, 1800K wall lights now have less than 3% of the skyglow of the original Metal Halide partly shielded fixtures and use about 7 Watts. That's only 9% of the original power. The bollard sidewalk lights are retrofitted with 3D printed shields and color filter lenses have only 28% of the skyglow compared to the original unshielded and unfiltered values. The zero-uplight parking lot lights have 75% less skyglow impact than the originals. The only artificial lighting on the property is on the Visitor Center Grounds and on the KVR Maintenance Building.

Floodplain

Repetitive flooding of historical proportions over the life of the KVR, has brought about an acute awareness to consider resiliency and mitigation in managing the property. Human safety concerns as well as minimizing repair costs have led to policies of streambank restoration, managed vegetation, and minimal or modified structures within the floodplain. All campsites are located outside of the floodplain and have emergency evacuation routes to higher ground when applicable.

LAND MANAGEMENT OVERVIEW

Established Conservation Policies

Forestry

Sustainable timber management is prescribed as part of the overall management of the Reserve. The 3,600 acres of officially designated State Natural Area are generally left undisturbed. Management decisions are developed based on the Wisconsin State Forest Inventory Reporting System (WiSFIRS) data that was completed for the State-owned portion of the Reserve in 2019. Prior to conducting management, the site will be thoroughly evaluated for sensitive archeological, cultural, and environmental resources. The need for revenue will not overshadow the commitment to protection and preservation of these sites.

Invasive Species

The greatest threat to the diverse populations of plants and animals are the aggressive invasive species, many of which are well established on the Reserve. A few of the invasive species include honeysuckle, garlic mustard, buckthorn, hedge parsley, and autumn olive. Weighing risk to benefit, the KVR staff does use chemical control treatments when applicable. Mechanical or hand control is preferred but very labor intensive with marginal results. Through staff and volunteer training, interagency networking, and research, determinations are allowed to be made on a case-by-case basis in addressing the intruders.



LAND MANAGEMENT OVERVIEW

Established Conservation Policies

Native Prairie Species Protection

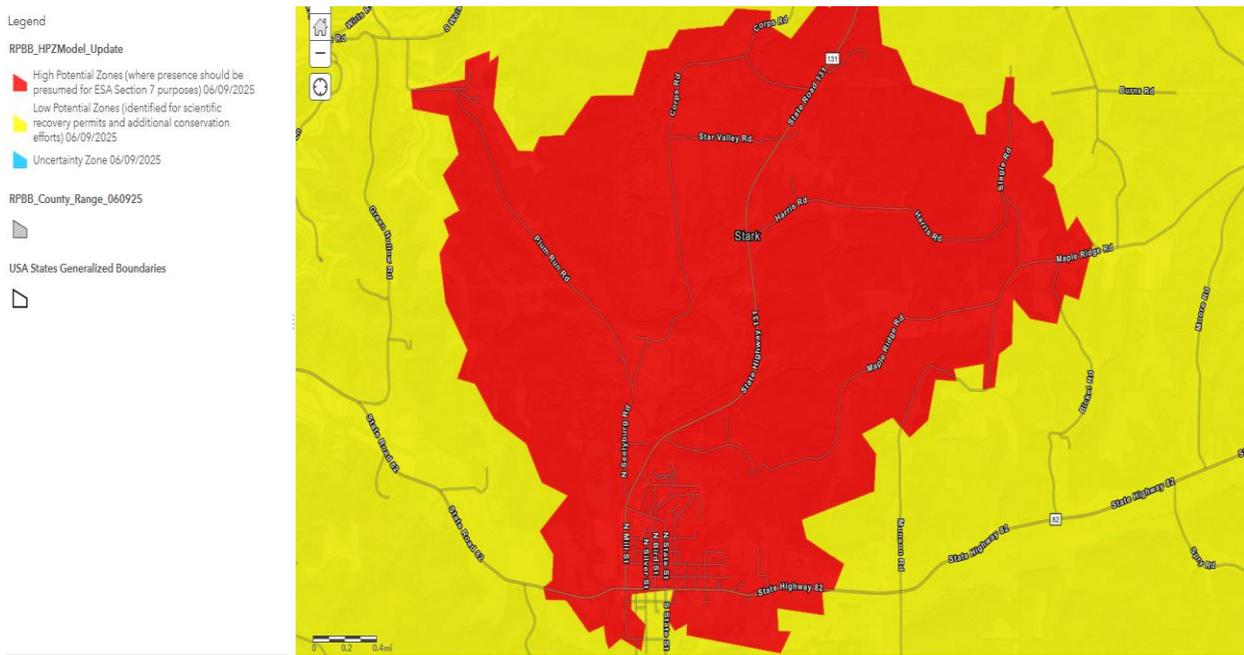
Many of our native grass areas are being managed through timely mowing to remove invasives such as wild parsnip, or individual plant removal if there is only a few. In addition, the native prairies are on a rotation to manage with prescribed fire every other year, or once every three years to set back any woody vegetation and invigorate the native grasses. In native prairie areas that have more forbs or favor more pollinator habitat, management will be done with timely mowing and spot treatment of invasives through mechanical or chemical means. State Road 131 within the KVR is part of an endangered species protection area for the critically endangered rusty patch bumblebee and threatened monarch butterfly.

[Link to roadway map](#)

[WI DOT FDM 24-20 Endangered Species](#)

[The Endangered Species Act of 1973](#)

Map showing High Potential zone for Critically Endangered Rusty Patch Bumblebee



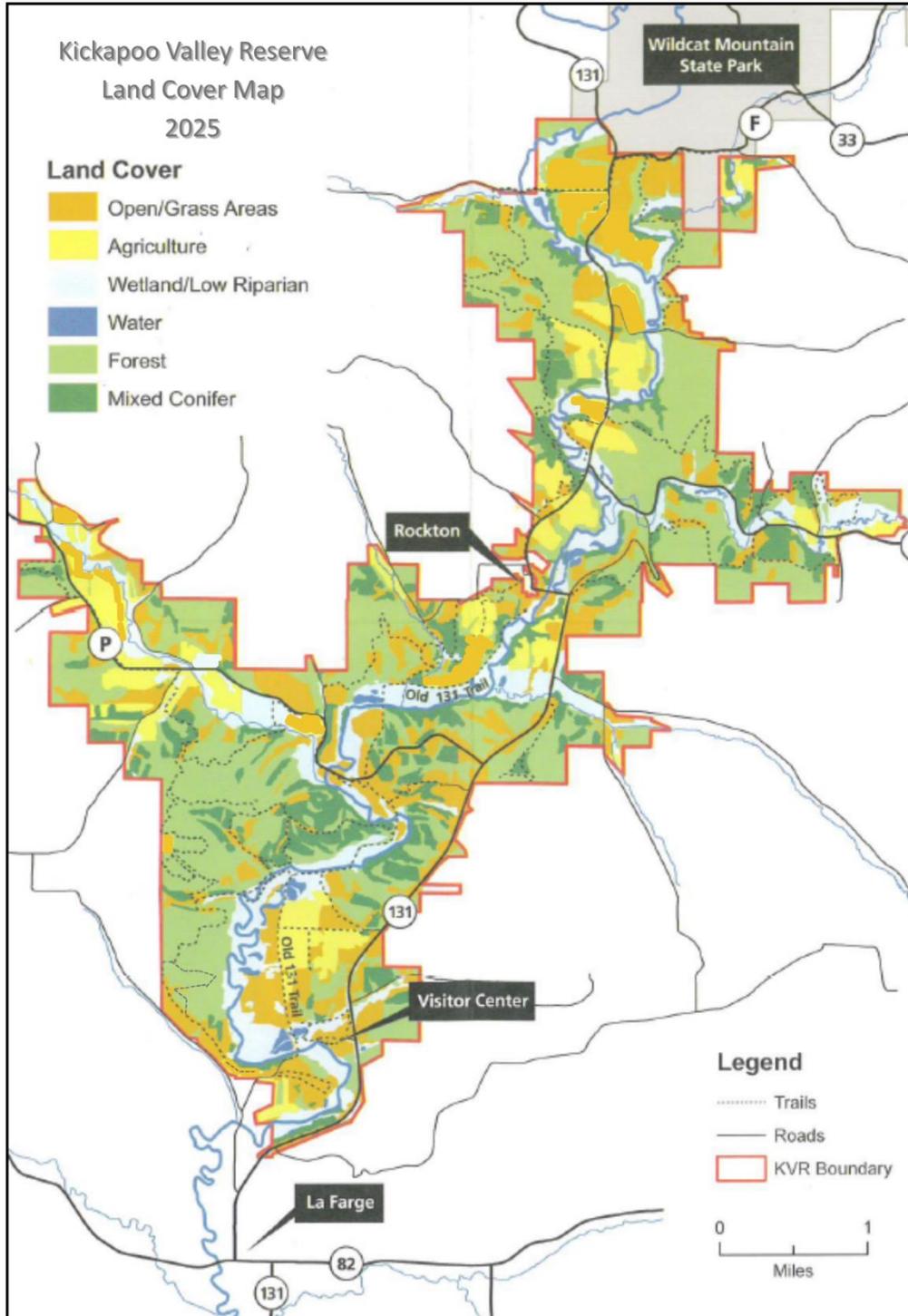
LAND MANAGEMENT OVERVIEW

Established Conservation Policies

Restoration

Recognition that the inherited property had been settled, logged, farmed and utilized by humans for hundreds of years leads to acceptance that restoration will take time. Conversion of previously grazed or farmed land to prairie and restoring the native ecosystem diversity in woodlands following timber harvests are ongoing and long-term efforts to restore previously impacted lands.





LAND MANAGEMENT OVERVIEW

Recreation Policies

Recreation

Recreation on the property is non-motorized, including electric motors and any class of e-bike. A mobility impaired permit or special event permit is required to use a motorized vehicle on the property. These permits are issued by the Executive Director on a case by case basis and must be renewed annually. Recreational use of the property includes horseback riding, bicycling, hiking, camping, backpacking, canoeing, kayaking, bird watching, star gazing, cross country skiing, snowshoeing, geo-caching, foraging (for personal use only), and generally enjoying nature. Snowmobiling is allowed on designated trails when those trails are open. Users 16 years and over are required to have a pass.

Camping

There are 33 designated campsites on the property. Campsites are individual camping party sites and are located throughout the property except for Campsite D which has 8 individual sites in the same area. Each campsite has a max capacity of 10 people per site. Each site can be occupied by the same camping party for not longer than 10 consecutive days. Campers must vacate the property for 7 days before returning to any campsite on the property. Camping is for registered campers only, and fees must be paid prior to setting up camp.



LAND MANAGEMENT OVERVIEW

Recreation Policies

Trails

Many visitors experience the Reserve through using the trails. Whether it is the natural surface trails, the paved Old Highway 131 Trail, or the Kickapoo River Water Trail, all trails lead to the exploration of the beauty of the Kickapoo Valley Reserve. The fifty plus miles of trails for hiking, biking and equestrian use have undergone an extensive evaluation over the past fifteen years to ensure they are built sustainably and do not impact cultural or environmentally sensitive sites. Lessons have been learned from the frequent flooding; visitor impacts and the effects of mother nature. The most important protective policy is to close the trails during wet weather. Not only is it unsafe to ride a horse or bike on natural surface trail during wet conditions, but it also quickly damages the trail. Depressions are created that hold or channel water and do not allow the trail to shed water as designed. Regular maintenance is imperative to keeping a trail sustainable. Over time, all trails will begin to form a berm on the edge of the trail. By taking the berm off periodically, it ensures the trail has proper drainage and performs as it was designed to. Efforts to keep the trail corridor cleared are especially important after any storm events. Staff and volunteers check for downed trees to remove as soon as possible. This prevents users from making a new trail to navigate around the downed tree, which could result in damage to the surrounding vegetation and increased erosion. In addition, users are encouraged to practice responsible trail etiquette, including educating themselves on other uses of the trail system. With most of the trails being shared use trails, proper trail etiquette is very important. Education of bikers, hikers, and equestrian riders on what to do when meeting each other keeps all users safe. Additionally, users are reminded to treat all users with respect and courtesy regardless of their sport, speed, or skill level. Finally, trail users are directed to protect the trails and surrounding areas by staying on designated trails. In 2021 Old Hwy 131 Trail was designated a National Recreation Trail by the US Department of Interior.



LAND MANAGEMENT OVERVIEW

Recreation Policies

Kickapoo River Water Trail

The Kickapoo River is managed as a water trail. 15 miles of the Kickapoo River flows through the property. The river is a popular river for paddlers. River access landings on the property are maintained at Bridges 5, 7, 10, Landing 12, Bridge 14 and 18. Landing 18 requires a short portage to the parking area. The river is maintained as conditions allow by KVR to be reasonably cleared of log jams and blockages. An Upper Kickapoo River Guide is created and maintained by staff. A KVR parking pass is required to park at a river access points including Landing 5, 7, 10, 12, 14 and 18.



Hunting, Trapping and Fishing

Hunting, fishing, and trapping are allowed in the Kickapoo Valley Reserve, except for a 300-foot buffer area around buildings and a 1000 ft no hunting zone around the Visitor Center. The property is shared use. All users should wear bright colors and be mindful of hunting and trapping activities on the property. The Kickapoo Valley Reserve follows all regulations and rules as indicated by state laws. Consult Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources publications for these regulations. Hunting, trapping, and fishing licenses are not available at the Kickapoo Valley Reserve Visitor Center. Hunters and fishers are exempt from use fees when actively hunting and fishing, except for when parking at a river access point, where a parking pass is required. Use of trail cameras is prohibited. Tree stands must be removed at the end of hunting hours each day. No target practice is allowed on the property, including in campsites. The KVR is a pheasant release area. The WI DNR provides stock birds for KVR staff and volunteers to release during the regular pheasant season.

LAND MANAGEMENT OVERVIEW

Law Enforcement Policies

Law Enforcement

The Kickapoo Valley Reserve maintains enforcement staff to uphold safety of its users and protection of the natural features of the Reserve. Enforcement officers are fully qualified and certified police officers by the State of Wisconsin Department of Justice.

Not all KVR Officers are full-time staff. For any emergency, contact the sheriff's office by calling 911. For non-emergency enforcement issues, contact the KVR office during office hours or the Vernon County Sheriff's office after office hours to relay a request to summon an officer. The KVR police maintain mutual aid agreements with Vernon County sheriff's office and other local municipalities. The KVR works closely with local law enforcement and first responders by hosting regular training and opportunities to become familiar with the property.



Courtesy Notices

Officers will issue a courtesy notice on a vehicle or to a person who does not display proof of purchasing a KVR permit. The courtesy notices are a “please pay reminder” and are not recorded on any state or county records. No additional fees are applied currently. Payments of courtesy notices can be made at the KVR office or online at: kvr.wi.gov/KVRProducts.aspx. Please include user permit copy and courtesy notice with payment. Failure to pay after receiving a courtesy notice may result in additional fines. If, by chance, an officer incorrectly leaves a courtesy notice at your vehicle (i.e. overlooked/did not see permit), please bring it to the visitor center and the courtesy notice will be voided.

Use of Drones

The use of drones for recreational purposes is not permitted on the Kickapoo Valley Reserve. Drone use is authorized only in support of the following activities:

- Search and rescue efforts.
- Training by local public safety agencies in support of drone usage for search and rescue efforts or other efforts intended to protect public health and safety. Agencies should notify the Executive Director or Property Manager of the date, time, and location of any planned training activities prior to flight.
- Monitoring of utility infrastructure on existing easements by the relevant utility company or their agent. • Educational or resource monitoring projects, with approval from the Executive Director. Members of the Ho-Chunk Nation may operate drones on tribal trust lands for educational or resource monitoring projects with approval from the appropriate tribal representative.

Leave No Trace and Outdoor Ethics

Leave No Trace principles apply on the property.

- Plan Ahead and Prepare
- Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces
- Dispose of Waste Properly
- Leave What You Find.
- Minimize Campfire Impacts
- Respect Wildlife
- Be Considerate of Other Visitors

Administrative Rules

The rules of the Kickapoo Valley Reserve are defined in [chapter KB 1](#), Wisconsin Administrative Code.

LAND MANAGEMENT OVERVIEW

Fees and Permits

User Fees

Except for individuals actively hunting, trapping, or fishing in the appropriate seasons, all KVR users need to purchase a user permit or pass. Day use and annual passes include parking within the Reserve, but do not include camping fees. Campers are required to purchase a camping permit as well as a day use pass, if applicable. Any vehicle (including those who are hunting or fishing) parked at a canoe landing is required to display a parking permit, unless a day use, annual pass, or camping permit is present on vehicle.

Passes and Permits

- Use Passes
- Day pass \$5/person aged 16 and over
- Parking pass \$5/vehicle parked at river access
- Individual annual pass \$25 per person*
- Family annual pass \$40/family* (living at the same address)
- State Park passes do not apply
- Camping Permits
- \$20/night* for vehicle accessible sites
- \$15/night* for non-vehicle accessible sites
- Special Event Permit
- Camping \$75/night for approved special event permits
- Mobility Impaired Permit
- Case by case permit by application

*fee amended per KRMB December 2025



LAND MANAGEMENT OVERVIEW

Noteworthy Highlights 2020-2025

- Kickapoo Valley Reserve has supported dark sky conservation efforts. According to recent surveys, skies have become too bright to qualify for the Dark Sky Park designation, dark sky conservation work has shifted to decreasing sky glow and education regarding the importance of dark sky lighting.
- A streambank stabilization project located below Bridge 16 and along Old Hwy 131 Trail was completed and has successfully mitigated the effects stream bank loss along Old Hwy 131 Trail in that area.
- Volunteers and citizen scientists were utilized in habitat improvement projects including invasive species removal, native seed collection and native seed plantings.
- Protective measures including education and rule enforcement were applied to ensure protection and preservation of cultural resources.
- Funding was secured through events, and initiatives including matching grant money for habitat improvement, tree sponsorship program and other eco-enhancing projects.
- Implemented policies and processes to better protect and manage user impacts, including, online fee payment and online campsite booking systems. The KVR has seen a steady increase in new visitors and increased use after the 2020 pandemic.



LAND MANAGEMENT PROJECT GOALS, PRIORITIES AND OBJECTIVES

The following is a summary of the priority projects and the strategies for implementation over the course of the five-year Master Plan (2026-2030) as identified by Land Management Committee. Implementation strategies are identified where appropriate, and priorities are assigned.

| Goals | Priority | Objectives | Resources |
|-------------------------------|----------|--|-----------|
| Visitor Impact Management | High | Monitor and minimize impacts through management Schedule in rest times for heavily impacted campsites Provide and maintain designated hardened surfaces to minimize impact | |
| Safety on Shared Use Property | High | Provide targeted outreach and education about safety on shared use property through collaboration with emergency management communication tools. Develop interactive maps Create minimal effective signage Implement trail/property App | |
| Recreation Management | High | Maintain minimal signage Create wayfinding | |

| | | | |
|--|--------|--|--|
| | | materials, adding distances and elevation where appropriate Public Information Outreach Trail Maintenance River Maintenance | |
| Law Enforcement | High | Keep law enforcement policies updated. Review law enforcement policies annually -Increase part time officer pool. | |
| Collaboration with Environmental/Conservation Groups | Medium | Support bird habitat through ecosystem-based management on the KVR · Collaborate with monarch butterfly initiatives to receive grants and conservation permissions. ·Citizen scientist programs ·Pollinator habitat improvements -Engage with UW researchers or others | Kickapoo Bird Habitat Initiative ·Kickapoo Valley Dark Sky Initiative ·Monarch Watch WI Department of Transportation Ho -Chunk Nation DNR WI DNR and others |
| Land Rental | Medium | Manage and maintain current and future ag leases ·Explore alternative | Vernon County Land & Water WI DNR Organic Valley |

| | | | |
|---------------------------|--------|--|--|
| | | <p>agriculture, permaculture, organic, hay only cropping ·Education and outreach</p> | |
| Dark Sky Conservation | High | <p>Add motion- sensing controls to current lighting to further reduce environmental impact, save energy, and demonstrate best practice to the public. -Use the KVR as a Dark Sky example highlighting the most innovative dark sky lighting available</p> | <p>Kickapoo Valley Dark Sky Initiative Dark Sky Wisconsin</p> |
| Water Resource Management | Medium | <p>Engage in flood resiliency efforts and initiatives -Old Hwy 131 N near north gate -West Ridge Trail large tube near former bridge 17 -Engage with water quality initiatives</p> | |