

the gem

KICKAPOO VALLEY RESERVE NEWSLETTER

SINCE 2000

FALL NEWSLETTER - SEPTEMBER 2026

VOL. 31 ISSUE 3 • FALL 2026

DAM Challenge



TRIATHLON
SATURDAY



OCTOBER 3, 2026

FRIENDS OF KICKAPOO VALLEY RESERVE
INVITE YOU TO

Community Pasta Supper

Friday, October 2, 2026

5-8pm

Kickapoo Valley Reserve Visitor Center
LaFarge, WI

All you can eat, everyone is welcome!

\$15/adult, \$5/Age 12 and under

Kickapoo Valley Reserve

kickapoovalley.wi.gov



**WELCOME
FALL IN THE
KICKAPOO VALLEY**

"There's an endless autumn in me,
scenting my thoughts like
campfire smoke."

— Jarod K. Anderson



Wintergreen Bluff Trail in Fall



WHAT'S HAPPENING

Sept 12 | Archery and crossbow deer season opens
 Sept 23 | Nature Bound Fall Semester begins, 9am
 Sept 23 | Driftless Dialogue: Monarch Conservation, 5:30pm
 Oct 2 | Friends of KVR Community Pasta Supper, 5-8pm
 Oct 3 | Dam Challenge Triathlon
 Oct 8 | Education & Tourism Committee meeting, 5:30pm
 Oct 10-11 | Youth gun deer season
 Oct 12 | Driftless Dialogue: Forest and Flood Resilience, 5:30pm
 Oct 15 | KRMB meeting, 6pm
 Oct 16 | Friends of KVR photo contest deadline
 Oct 17 | Pheasant season opens
 Nov 9 | Driftless Dialogue: Ho-Chunk Agriculture
 Nov 16 | Equestrian and bike trails close for season
 Nov 16 | Winter hours for Visitor Center begin
 Nov 19 | KRMB meeting, 6pm
 Nov 21-29 | Gun deer season
 Nov 26 | Visitor Center closed
 Nov 30 – Dec 9 | Muzzleloader deer season
 Dec 5 | Friends of KVR Holiday Happening, 1pm
 Dec 9 | Driftless Dialogue: Archaeology, 5:30pm
 Dec 17 | KRMB meeting, 6pm
 Dec 24-25 | Visitor Center closed
 Dec 24 – Jan 1, 2027 | Antlerless-only gun deer hunt
 Dec 31 – Jan 1, 2027 | Visitor Center closed
 Jan 1, 2027 | 2027 Trail Challenge begins
 Jan 9, 2027 | Winter Festival

Directors Discourse

BY JASON LEIS - KVR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Fall is upon us and as I write this, it is just starting to rain with a threat of many inches and possible flooding. I hope the forecasters are wrong. I want to quickly thank our wonderful volunteers for their hours of service and the Friends of KVR for their continued support.

We could also use some more volunteers for the Dam Challenge Triathlon coming up on Oct. 3. Please consider helping out. It is a fun event, and we hear every year from the participants that we have the greatest volunteers of any race they attend.

Hunting seasons are also upon us, so wear those bright colors when out recreating. Enjoy this wonderful sweatshirt weather and get out and enjoy the sights and sounds of fall.

Jason



Kickapoo Valley Reserve 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.

For the Birds

BY JANA MUEHLENKAMP - GUEST SERVICES ASSOCIATE

One attraction at the Kickapoo Valley Reserve Visitor Center are the wild birds at the birdfeeders. Weather viewing them through the spotting scope, binoculars, sitting at a bench on the deck or on a blanket on the lawn, observing wild birds improves mental health, reduces stress, encourages mindfulness, builds mental sharpness and encourages movement. Available at the Visitor Center desk, we have a donation box to help us continue to purchase seed and suet for the birdfeeders. Any size donation is appreciated. Contact us for more information.

Stop by sometime and enjoy this peaceful space with noteworthy birdsong and all the diverse kinds of birds. It's fantastic!





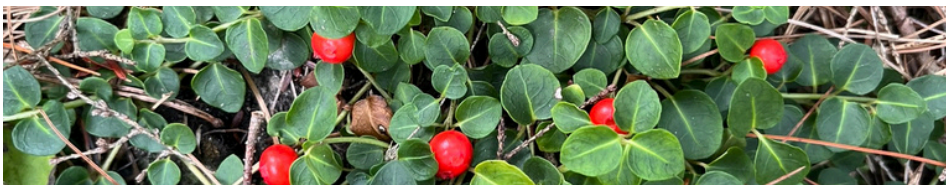
Do you have an mwt.net email account?

There are nearly 300 KVR passholders that have an mwt.net email address, some of which we expect are Vernoncom customers. As you may know, mwt.net will no longer be available for those folks. We don't want you to miss a thing when mwt.net is shut off this December. Please use this link to update your contact information with us. Be sure to include your new email address, the one you are going to use instead of mwt.net, so we can update your account and make sure you continue to get news and information from the Kickapoo Valley Reserve.

Follow this link to provide us with your updated email address.

<https://forms.gle/rD94yk9owZuRCTw4A>

You can also email us at kickapoo.reserve@krm.state.wi.us



2027 Annual Passes

DIANE GLOEDE- GUEST SERVICES ASSOCIATE

An annual pass for the Kickapoo Valley Reserve allows year long access to exploring and relaxing at the reserve and can be purchased online or at the Visitor Center.

The fee for an individual pass is \$25, and \$40 for a family pass. Fees go to support the work done to keep the property accessible for recreation and for habitat improvements. Continuous work is also being done eradicating invasives and putting in native plants to support butterflies and other pollinators.

Reserve passes make excellent gifts for friends and family!

Thank you for your continued support.

[Please consider becoming a Friend of Kickapoo Valley Reserve.](#)



Seasonal Field Notes

Visitor Center Seasonal Hours

As the leaves start to change, the days get shorter and clocks fall back an hour, the Visitor Center hours change too.

Monday-Saturday 8:00am – 4:30pm
Sunday and Holidays 10am - 4pm

Visitor Center Hours after
November 15, 2026
Monday-Saturday 8:00am – 4:30pm
Sunday and Holidays - Closed



2027 Kickapoo Valley Reserve Annual Passes Available for purchase beginning December 1, 2026



Wilderness Adventure Camp

Education Corner

THANKS TO THESE
GENEROUS SUMMER
CAMP SPONSORS!

2026 KVR Summer Camps are generously sponsored by Friends of Kickapoo Valley Reserve, GoMacro, Cabela's, Echo, and Organic Valley. Summer learning and fun is made possible by contributors like YOU.

Thank You!



Cabela's



Where the Wild Things Are Camp



Waterways Camp



Kinder Camp



Plant Curiosities Camp



Art Sprouts Camp

Summer Camp Kudos

AMY DVORAK- SUMMER CAMP INSTRUCTOR & EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT

Another year of Summer Adventure Camps has come and gone. For eight weeks, the KVR hosted 142 children aged two to 17 years old to 18 different summer camps. Some of the camps were focused on specific topics: fly fishing, plants, overnight camping, or art. Others were more general, teaching teamwork or general science knowledge. However, all camps had one thing in common: experiencing and appreciating nature. The goal of our summer camps is to encourage children to be outside and respect nature. The KVR follows the leave no trace principles, and this is instilled in the campers.



Trail Trekkers Camp

These Summer Adventure Camps couldn't happen without our phenomenal instructors. They spend hours planning activities, like building birdhouses from gourds or creating lip balm. Even when they aren't actively sitting down to work on their schedule, they are thinking about camp. They see an article in a paper and think, "We should do that in camp!" Additionally, the instructors and their assistants are masters at pivoting. Without complaint, they switched gears when they had to stay inside due to inclement weather, swarms of mosquitoes, or wildfire smoke. KVR staff may handle the overall planning, but it's the instructors who make camp an unforgettable experience.



Bikes and Bumblebees

BY DANA E GARDNER - KVR EDUCATION INTERN

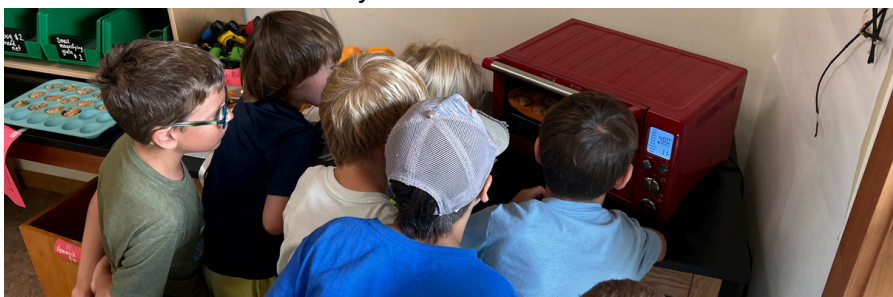
Trail Trekkers summer camp is always full of action and adventure as we explore the Kickapoo Valley Reserve's trails on foot and on bike! Although we have many fun activities planned for the week, sometimes nature makes its own. One morning a

bumblebee had gotten stuck in our classroom, and I had managed to safely capture it in a bug container. Striking the chance, I was able to safely show all the campers what a bumblebee looked like up close!



After talking about the pollen on its legs and letting the bee go outside, we read "The Beeman", a story about what honeybees do and how we collect their honey through beekeeping, which had "Grandma's

Apple and Honey Muffins" recipe at the end. It quickly became obvious to Jackie and me that this was a clear opportunistic moment in education we just had to take.



Throughout the week, we drew different kinds of bees, made their habitats out of clay, made the apple and honey muffins, and explored how bees give us honey through pollination. Although it wasn't directly related to biking, bees and flowers became a point of interest as we flew down trails, with campers pointing out the bees they saw. Even though a bee-focused learning plan wasn't in our original objectives for a bike camp, the experience taught us this: Education in nature is not linear. When life gives you bees, make Grandma's apple and honey muffins.

Education Corner

FALL NATURE BOUND



Nature Bound is a program that combines nature and literacy for youth aged 18 mo. to 17 years old. Youth are immersed in the changing of seasons, nature's rhythms and exploring outdoors while incorporating reading, writing and ecological science.

2 sessions of 4 classes each

Session 1: Sept. 23, 30 & Oct. 7, 14

Session 2: Oct. 21, 28 & Nov. 4, 11

[Visit our website to register](#)

Nature Bound programs are focused on literacy and nature. Seasonal nature stories, natural science and learning are incorporated into lessons as we explore phenology and immerse ourselves in the natural world around us. Each student goes home with a book about nature. Books are donated by folks like you! If you have gently used children's nature books or would like to donate books to the program, please reach out to us.

kickapoo.reserve@krm.state.wi.us

On 8600 Acres

Invasives Species in all Seasons

Invasives are relentless. Each season brings a new species to hunt down and eradicate. Summer is a good time to find and attack Spotted Knapweed. [Click this link](#) for a factsheet and suggested control methods on this aggressive invasive plant.



Oh, what this tree has seen!



Located on the Kickapoo Valley Reserve, this 42-inch white pine towers over one of the State Natural Areas within the boundaries of the KVR. Did you know there are 3600 acres of State Natural Area within the 8600-acre Kickapoo Valley Reserve boundary.

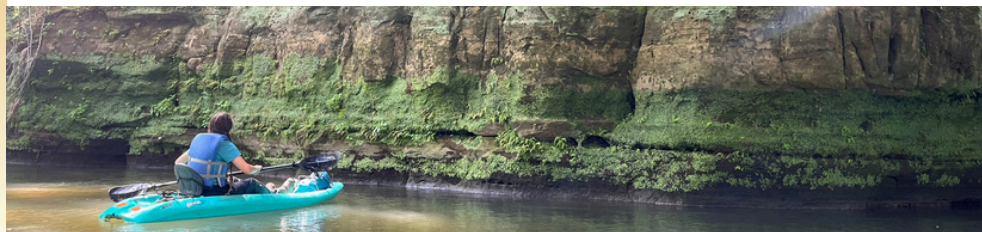
Fall Recreation Reminders

BY JESSE HANEY - KVR POLICE OFFICER/PROPERTY MANAGER

Cooler temperatures and changing leaves make fall one of the busiest and most enjoyable times to explore the Kickapoo Valley Reserve. With many activities occurring at the same time, please keep these reminders in mind:

- **Hunting:** The KVR is open to public hunting. Non-hunting visitors should be aware of current hunting seasons and consider wearing blaze orange or another highly visible color. Hunters must identify their target and what lies beyond it while remaining mindful that hikers and other visitors may be nearby. All visitors should respect each other's activities.
- **Foraging:** Edible fruits, nuts, wild mushrooms, and wild asparagus may be gathered with a daily or annual KVR access permit. Anything gathered must be for personal, non-commercial use. Other plants and natural materials may not be removed without authorization.
- **Wild ginseng:** Although Wisconsin's wild ginseng season runs from September 1 through November 1, harvesting wild ginseng is prohibited on state-owned or administered land, including the KVR.
- **Dogs:** The seasonal leash requirement ends July 31. During the fall, dogs may be off leash but must remain under control through a leash, voice commands, whistle, kennel, or mechanical collar. Owners must prevent their dogs from interfering with wildlife or other visitors and must remove pet waste from high-use areas. See Wis. Admin. Code § KB 1.05 and Wis. Stat. § 174.01.
- **Bicycles and horses:** Bicycles and horses must remain on trails or in areas designated for their use. These trails are generally open through November 15, weather permitting. Temporary closures may occur because of wet conditions.
- **Maps and trail conditions:** Carry an official KVR map because crowdsourced trail applications may contain inaccurate information. Check current trail conditions before visiting and respect all posted closures.
- **Leave No Trace:** Pack out everything you bring with you, stay on designated trails where required, and help protect the Reserve's natural and cultural resources.

Fall brings many different users together on the Reserve. Please remain aware of your surroundings, communicate courteously when passing others, and help make the KVR safe and welcoming for everyone.



Hunt Safely

BY JESSE HANEY - KVR POLICE OFFICER/PROPERTY MANAGER

Hunting is a longstanding part of Wisconsin's culture. As hunters, we have a responsibility to carry that tradition forward by hunting safely, acting ethically, and respecting the public lands we are fortunate to use.



As a Wisconsin Hunter Education instructor, I remind everyone to handle firearms responsibly and remember that alcohol and firearms do not mix. Hunters must also remain aware of others using the Reserve. Hikers, horseback riders, bicyclists, and other hunters may be nearby, so always positively identify your target and know what is beyond it. Be courteous to everyone you encounter. Each of us represents the hunting community, and our actions help shape public support for hunting on public lands.

During any firearm deer season, Wisconsin requires at least 50% of your clothing above the waist to be blaze orange or fluorescent pink for all hunters. Any head covering must also be at least 50% blaze orange or pink. I often encounter hunters wearing the proper jacket or vest but a regular ball cap or stocking cap, which does not meet the requirement.

Tree stands are another major concern. Having been in law enforcement for 17 years and most of that in conservation law enforcement, I have seen firsthand how quickly a hunt could turn into an emergency. We respond to tree stand falls each year, most of which cause significant injury. If you hunt from an elevated stand: inspect your stand and straps, wear a full-body safety harness, remain attached to the tree while climbing, and use a haul line for your unloaded firearm or bow.

Do not underestimate the rugged Driftless terrain. Know your location and let others know where you are going and what time to expect you back. Climbing steep hills with hunting gear and dragging out a deer can place significant stress on your heart. Pace yourself, take breaks, stay hydrated, and ask for help when needed. Cardiovascular conditioning prior to the season is a great way to prepare your body for the hunt and will have a positive impact on all aspects of your health. A successful hunt is not just about filling a tag. It is about hunting ethically, representing our tradition well, and making it home safely.



The WI DNR provides pheasants to stock the Kickapoo Valley Reserve for hunting each fall. Stocked bird numbers have historically been around 2400 birds. These birds are delivered to the KVR by the WI DNR and released by KVR staff and volunteers at various times during the pheasant season. The 2026 season will see a decrease in release numbers on the KVR to 2,040 birds due to WI DNR budget restraints.

Summer Habitat Work Highlights

Summer habitat work at the Kickapoo Valley Reserve focused on controlling invasive species, protecting pollinator habitat, and improving the native landscape around the Visitor Center. Invasive-species control is a constant effort throughout the growing season. Staff and volunteers targeted wild parsnip by mowing infested areas before the plants could produce and spread seed. Volunteers also spent many hours pulling spotted knapweed by hand. This work is demanding, but it prevents invasive plants from crowding out the native vegetation that wildlife and pollinators depend on.

Special attention was given to designated pollinator habitat near County Highway P and 24 Valley Road. These areas provide important food and cover for monarch butterflies, native bees, and other pollinators. Much of the work that protects monarch habitat happens quietly behind the scenes. We would especially like to recognize the volunteers whose persistence helps keep these areas healthy from year to year.

Volunteers and staff also planted a new native garden at the Visitor Center using donated plants. The project was highlighted by the Executive Director in the August Outreach email and is another example of how volunteer support directly improves the Reserve.

We sincerely appreciate everyone who contributed time, plants, equipment, and hard work this summer. These projects would not be possible without the dedication of our volunteers, and their efforts will benefit the Reserve's plants, wildlife, and visitors for years to come.

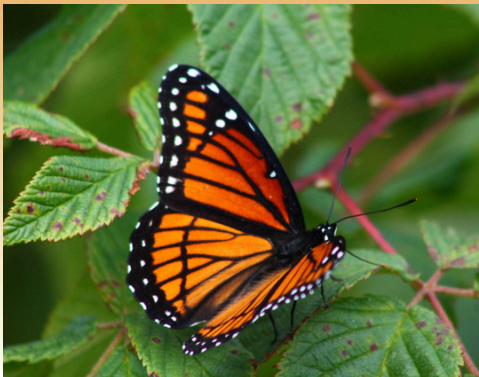


Naturalist Notes

GOOD TO KNOW

Monarch Conservation Resources:

- [USDA Monarch Conservation Programs](#)
- [Monarch Watch](#)
- [US Forest Service Monarch Conservation](#)
- [Wisconsin Monarch Collaborative](#)
- [WI DNR Make a Place for Monarchs](#)



Citizen Science & Monarch Conservation

BY: CHRISTIAN MALANKA - NATURALIST AND VOLUNTEER

In life it is human nature to take simple splendor for granted or inherently not recognize how fragile that segment of nature is. In July of 2022 the International Union for Conservation of Nature placed the Monarch Butterfly on their red list. The list is the most comprehensive of endangered species. Internationally, the Monarch is endangered. Habitat loss, pesticide and herbicide use, climate fluctuation that impedes milkweed growth, ground scorching fire from extreme hazardous fuel loading and lack of rain have devastated the Monarch population worldwide.

Conservation efforts include habitat re-establishment, milkweed planting, and the citizen scientist who on a small scale help facilitate the survival of not only the Monarch but other native species of fauna and flora.

Enter Marine Corps veteran and homesteader Cara Welk who has dedicated the last five summer seasons to safeguard the Monarch in a small corner of Vernon County and beyond. Autodidactically, she has learned how to locate butterfly eggs and where they are least likely to progress in the wild, she has nurtured them through caterpillar stage and chrysalis until they emerge as a Monarch. After a period of rest, the butterflies are released into the wild where it is hoped they will mate once more and produce another of the four generations that occur in our area. As of this writing, 486 Monarchs have been released by Cara. It may seem like a small number but that is more than 85% of the total number of caterpillars collected. The remaining 15% succumbed to parasites and milkweed tainted by pesticides and herbicides drifting from area farms. In the wild only about 10% caterpillars reach maturity. In some regions it is only 5% (Source: birdsandblooms.com).

Cara did something different for 2026. She cultivated milkweed on her property. Although much of it grows wild, she had great success growing healthy milkweed in raised beds. Despite the cultivation it was necessary to harvest milkweed leaves elsewhere. Although some of the harvested leaves turned out to have a hitchhiker in the form of an egg or new caterpillar, each leaf was inspected to reduce the likelihood a caterpillar might emerge as a butterfly unassisted. Although no butterflies were released in the KVR this year, many of the Monarchs released elsewhere grew strong on wild milkweed leaves that were far from farms and roads.

A special salute is extended to Executive Director Jason Leis and his crew who facilitated milkweed growth on segments of the Reserve. Through management that included prescribed fire and selective mowing, as well as some good weather, milkweed is abundant this year in the safest areas.

Everyone can help in the survival of the Monarch butterfly by putting a small area of yard, open land or garden to cultivating milkweed. In doing so, with a consciences effort and cooperation we may never have to explain to our children and grandchildren where all the butterflies went.



Swallows on a wire

Phenology: Nature's Fall Calendar

BY: CATHY CHYBOWSKI - KVR INSTRUCTOR & NATURALIST

Have you noticed that birdsong has declined sharply despite the fact that there are actually more birds around? With few exceptions, most birds have completed their nesting cycle, are no longer defending territories, and are preparing for migration.

Shorebirds actually begin to move south in July and the bubbling “spink spank spink” song of the bob-o-link disappears from the fields where they nested. Swallows begin to gather by the hundreds on power lines along rural roadsides. Nighthawks have been on the move too, flashing the white patches on their long, pointed wings. As nature transitions into fall, hummingbirds will soon join the movement to warmer areas in search of food. Usually, they exit the state by the end of September just before we begin to see the juncos arriving here from farther north. These snowbirds will keep us company throughout the winter. Some birds slip away quietly but who will not notice the staging of bluebirds in large numbers or the migration of raptors and waterfowl?

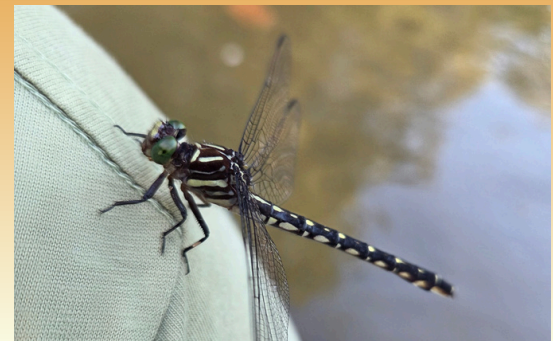
It is true that two-thirds of all birds migrate, but as the days grow shorter, migration is not just for the birds. Bats, insects, reptiles and amphibians migrate too. Huge energy reserves are required to make these seasonal journeys. Some move much farther than others. The last generation of monarch butterflies spend their days in late August into September sipping nectar from flowers to fuel up for their journey south.

Look around--when the New England aster is in peak bloom, the monarch migration is in full swing. This most familiar of butterflies has the most complex migration. They will fly hundreds of miles to spend the winter in the mountains of central Mexico. No single butterfly makes the round trip; I often wonder how they know where to go. This continues to be one of the unsolved mysteries of nature.

Have you witnessed the green darner dance yet? You can't miss this very large, green and blue dragonfly flitting about overhead. It is just one of the dragonfly species which migrates south, often alongside the monarch. Bats can live in the north because they can avoid the cold by hibernating, migrating, or migrating to hibernate. Usually, it is the cave bats including the little and big browns that can survive here by hibernating. The tree bats (red, hoary, silver-haired) usually migrate south.

Even reptiles and amphibians migrate to a certain degree. Many will move into the mud at the bottom of ponds and lakes to hibernate for the winter. Others will seek shelter under a layer of damp leaves, inside a fallen log or in another animal's burrow. There are many more easily observed fall phenological events. Sumac and red maple leaves begin to change color, wild plums ripen, deer begin to grow a winter coat, and ferns and tamaracks turn yellow. Look for buck rubs too and who can resist touching the seed pods of jewelweed hoping to experience this unusual seed dispersal method!

Naturalist Notes



we ♥
dark skies

Dark skies at the Visitor Center

Conservation in Action

Native Plant & Garden Club



NATIVE PLANT & GARDEN CLUB

KICKAPOO VALLEY RESERVE

Habitat improvement efforts on the Kickapoo Valley Reserve offer valuable education opportunities for those seeking knowledge of native plants and the value of adding them to existing gardens and habitat areas. No matter the lot size, each native plant gives pollinators a place to flourish and supports biodiversity and local food systems.

Reach out to us to become a member of the Kickapoo Valley Reserve Native Garden & Plant Club. As this group grows, plans are developing to share learning opportunities and together explore projects like seed collection, plant identification, garden transition projects and more!

Email us to get on the mailing list.
kickapoo.reserve@krm.state.wi.us



From Neutral to Native

BY DANA E GARDNER - KVR EDUCATION AND HABITAT INTERN

Native plants are one of the Kickapoo Valley Reserve's strongest features, and we're always looking for ways that we can improve and expand areas with more and more natives. In June, we received a generous donation of nine different native plant species from a talented local gardener. Knowing we wanted to find the perfect place for them where visitors could both see their beauty and learn about their importance, we turned to two small, plain grass triangles in the front yard of the Visitor Center. Not only was it a great educational opportunity, but more natives meant more resources for important pollinators, including the monarch, and less maintenance where mowing here wasn't needed anymore. Digging out the sod triangles left us with the perfect base to plug in a variety of the native plants. Low-growing plants like hairy wild petunia (*Ruellia humilis*), a plant of special concern in Wisconsin, were planted at the ends and on the edges, while plants that grow tall and large, such as big bluestem (*Andropogon gerardii*), were planted in the middle and at the back. This design will hopefully result in a beautiful cascading slope of growth from one end of the triangle to the other, allowing the chance for each native plant to grow in the same place without being outcompeted. To finish it off, educational signs were placed by a few of the native plants, providing visitors that walk by the chance to learn more about why these plants are important to the Reserve. Make sure to peek at our new native gardens when you visit to learn more about the significance of these native plants of the Kickapoo Valley Reserve!





Moist Cliff in State Natural Area on the KVR

State Natural Area Survey Work

BY: AMY DVORAK - KVR EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT - "NATIVE PLANT NERD"

For the second summer in a row, Danae Gardner, who was the summer intern, and I got to survey specific plant communities in the two State Natural Areas on the KVR. The plant communities included moist cliff, hemlock relict, floodplain forest, northern mesic forest, northern hardwood swamp, southern dry-mesic forest, and southern hardwood swamp. The purpose of these surveys is to determine if the plant communities still show exemplary examples of what that plant community should be. Some of these sites haven't been surveyed since the 1970s, and a lot has changed since then. The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WI DNR) manages the data and surveys through Wisconsin's Natural Heritage Inventory Program. Approximately 3,600 acres of the KVR has been designated by the WI DNR as a State Natural Area.

We visited 13 different sites: one southern mesic forest, one pine relict, one northern hardwood swamp, one southern dry-mesic forest, one floodplain forest, two hemlock relicts, and five moist cliffs. Of those sites, we only recommended to remove the floodplain forest from the list due to poor habitat quality.

An ecologist with the WI DNR assisted me with surveying a northern hardwood swamp and a southern hardwood swamp. Because he was so knowledgeable with sedges, he located a state-endangered sedge called smooth-sheath sedge (*Carex laevivaginata*). We also found an eastern white pine (*Pinus strobus*), with a diameter at breast height (DBH) of 41 cm, which is huge!

The best part of the surveys was getting to kayak the Kickapoo River from Landing 5 to Bridge 16 multiple times in order to survey moist cliffs. It included a makeshift anchor to hold us in one spot while we used binoculars to identify plant species high up on the cliffs. One of us, I won't say who, accidentally slid into the river not once but twice due to the slippery mud. During the moist cliff surveys, we confirmed a known healthy population of Canadian yew (*Taxus canadensis*), a plant species that has been declining in Wisconsin due to over-browsing by deer. We watched a Green Heron and a Great Blue Heron soaring down the river as well as an Osprey with its fresh catch fly over us.

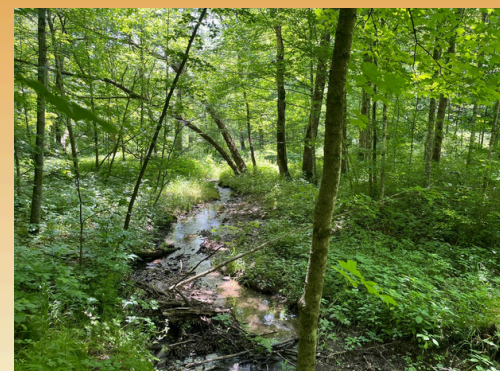
Getting to do these surveys is a privilege that I don't take for granted. Being out on the property for days at a time gives a new perspective on what the KVR has to offer. In addition to the observations described above, we saw Sandhill Cranes searching for food in a wetland, were surprised by so many frogs jumping into ponds below the moist cliffs, heard an Acadian Flycatcher (a state-threatened species), and climbed cliffs like Billy goats, testing our fear of heights. I encourage you to stop and really take in your environment the next time you visit the Reserve because there is so much to experience.

Conservation in Action

Collaboration on the Land



Forested seep survey (above) and moist cliff habitat (below).



Southern dry-mesic forest near Washout Trail.

EVENTS & PROGRAMS

Kickapoo Valley Reserve
La Farge, WI

DAM CHALLENGE TRIATHLON

OCTOBER 3,
2026



Paddle 7 | Pedal 15 | Run 3.5

All are welcome!

kickapoovalley.wi.gov

DAM CHALLENGE OCTOBER 3, 2026

THE GEM

Driftless Dialogue Lecture Series

MONARCH BUTTERFLY

BIOLOGY AND CONSERVATION IN A CHANGING WORLD

WEDNESDAY,
SEPTEMBER 23, 2026

SOCIALIZING AND REFRESHMENTS AT 5:30PM
PRESENTATION AT 6PM

KICKAPOO VALLEY RESERVE VISITOR CENTER
S3661 STATE ROAD 131, LA FARGE, WI 54639

THIS PROGRAM IS FREE AND OPEN TO EVERYONE



Monarch Conservation
September 23, 2026, 6pm

FOREST AND FLOOD RESILIENCE

LAND MANAGEMENT TO REDUCE FLOODING IN THE DRIFTLESS AREA:
A RICH HISTORY POINTING TO NEW OPPORTUNITIES

MONDAY, OCTOBER 12, 2026

SOCIALIZING AND REFRESHMENTS AT 5:30PM
PRESENTATION AT 6PM

KICKAPOO VALLEY RESERVE VISITOR CENTER
S3661 STATE ROAD 131, LA FARGE, WI 54639

THIS PROGRAM IS FREE AND OPEN TO EVERYONE



Forest and Flood Resilience
October 12, 2026, 6pm

HO-CHUNK AGRICULTURE

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 9, 2026

SOCIALIZING AND REFRESHMENTS AT 5:30PM
PRESENTATION AT 6PM

KICKAPOO VALLEY RESERVE VISITOR CENTER
S3661 STATE ROAD 131, LA FARGE, WI 54639

THIS PROGRAM IS FREE AND OPEN TO EVERYONE



Ho-Chunk Agriculture
November 9, 2026, 6pm

12,000 YEARS IN THE KICKAPOO VALLEY

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 9, 2026

SOCIALIZING AND REFRESHMENTS AT 5:30PM
PRESENTATION AT 6PM

KICKAPOO VALLEY RESERVE VISITOR CENTER
S3661 STATE ROAD 131, LA FARGE, WI 54639

THIS PROGRAM IS FREE AND OPEN TO EVERYONE



12,000 Years
December 9, 2026, 6pm



Fall dew on a spider web - Jackie Leis

Donations at Work



Recently, Friends of KVR made a generous donation to the KVR with the assistance in the purchase of a new mini skid steer. The Ditch Witch is used to maintain the trails on the KVR, plant trees and other management projects while being able to work lightly on the land. The original machine, also a Ditch Witch, that helped build many of the over 50 miles of trails in use now on the KVR, was purchased in 2007 and was growing weary. Next time you run into a Friends member, thank them for their continued support of the KVR and Friends of KVR! Donations like this one benefit everyone and the KVR as a whole. To become a Friend of KVR, learn more or donate, visit their website! www.kickapoofriends.org



Friends of KVR also support education programs at the KVR by offering scholarships for youth to be able to attend programming. Through the generosity of their memberships, KVR programs are made accessible to many children who might not otherwise be able to attend.

Fall Finds in the Friends Gift Shoppe located inside the Visitor Center

The next time you trail-hop or stop by the Visitor Center, make sure to step inside the newly updated Friends of KVR Gift Shoppe!

Fall inventory is hitting the shelves! Sweatshirts, new hats and more are available and make great gifts for yourself and others! From unique local artisan crafts and eco-friendly gear to educational nature pocket guides and books featuring local authors, there is truly something for every nature lover. Best of all, every single purchase directly supports our conservation efforts and educational programming here on the Kickapoo Valley Reserve.



Come explore the new look, find a unique treasure, and take a little piece of the Valley home with you!





Volunteers Abound!



Fun story: within 2 hours of installing the first bluebird house, there was a bluebird sitting on it!



The theme of the KVR hosted training was interconnectedness. Topics are fascinating on their own, but to know how they all work together is what makes someone a Master Naturalist and exemplary steward of the land.



Wisconsin Master Naturalists Graduate KVR Program

BY AMY DVORAK - WI MASTER NATURALIST INSTRUCTOR & KVR EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT

We wrapped up the last of four sessions of the Wisconsin Master Naturalist Training late summer. Eighteen participants spent eight days at the KVR between April and September learning everything they could about the Kickapoo Valley. Topics included Ho-Chunk history, birds, climate change, water quality, electrofishing, prescribed fires, dark sky lighting, geology, hydrology, prairie restoration, the dam history, and more. Whew! I don't know how they are going to be able to remember it all.

We started off the training in April with a cultural tour on Ho-Chunk Nation land on the KVR, led by Bill Quackenbush, the then-historic preservation officer for the Ho-Chunk Nation (he has since retired). This brought us back to the roots of the Kickapoo Valley, understanding the importance of this place to the First Nations people. The last day of training brought us to the present. We spent the day hearing from Brad Steinmetz, local historian, who shared the quick history of the US Army Corps of Engineers dam project and how the Kickapoo Valley Reserve came to be. In the afternoon, we visited old homesites on the KVR, understanding the more recent displacement of people. It reminded us that how we've used this land for the last thousands of years has created what we are seeing now.

As part of the training, participants were required to complete a service project. You'll see three new bluebird houses on the KVR: one at the Old Harris Road Trailhead and two along the West Ridge Trail. These were built and installed by two of our participants. We also have plans to install bird collision mitigation decals on our Visitor Center lobby windows, which was researched and suggested by one of the Master Naturalists. There are a few new presentations to view on our Visitor Center computer and new brochures to check out. Trails were cleared, invasive plants were removed, milkweed was planted, and monarch caterpillars were saved from roadside mowing by many of the students.

Lastly, I would be remised if I didn't acknowledge the fantastic teamwork by the KVR staff for this training. Five staff members, including me, are Master Naturalist Instructors: Jason Leis, Jesse Haney, Jackie Leis, and Rose Boyajian. We all took turns sharing our expertise with the participants as well as figuring out logistics, setting up the rooms, and scheduling the guest speakers. The program wouldn't have been such a success without everyone's input.

While there is no future Wisconsin Master Naturalist training scheduled at the KVR, you can view training opportunities at other locations through the [WI Master Naturalist website](#).



Bridge 18 Kickapoo Valley Reserve

FALL INTO VOLUNTEERING

Volunteering can come in many different forms. Current volunteer opportunities include:

- Seed collecting
- Donating cookies and bars for Pasta Supper
- Donation of gardening labor
- Assistance with sensitive area plant surveys
- Invasive species removal
- Trail checks for down trees & corridor clearing
- Driftless Dialogue hosts
- Volunteering at Dam Challenge (we need race timers and bike route volunteers!)
- Newsletter submissions
- HIke guides
- Nature Bound Helpers
- Bird Strike Mitigation Project on Visitor Center windows

There is a way for anyone interested and willing to combine a connection with nature and leaving the KVR a little better than they found it. We are grateful to our volunteers and the care and dedication they show in helping to preserve and protect the Kickapoo Valley Reserve. Every action makes a difference! Thank You!!

VOLUNTEER!



Volunteer Opportunities

COMMUNITY PASTA SUPPER



Volunteers are needed to assist at the Community Pasta Supper on Friday, October 2, 2026 from 5pm to 8pm at the Kickapoo Valley Reserve Visitor Center. Click the button to learn more!

VOLUNTEER AT PASTA SUPPER

DAM CHALLENGE



VOLUNTEER AT DAM CHALLENGE



It's Dam Challenge Time!

**Community Pasta Supper
Friday, October 2, 5-8pm**

**Dam Challenge Race Day
Saturday, October 3, 2026**



Deets on Dam Challenge



Registration

Registration for Dam Challenge closes on Wednesday, September 30th! Don't miss out!

[Register to race!](#) →



Race Manual

Everything you need to know about Dam Challenge is in the 2026 Race Manual!

[Check it out!](#) →

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Dam Challenge