



Kickapoo Visions

People of the Kickapoo Valley working together to promote good stewardship of the watershed

KICKAPOO CONVERSATIONS — Let Every Voice Be Heard

By Kathy Fairchild

As you read this, VSN is busily planning the details for holding what we believe to be a one-of-a-kind community effort: Kickapoo Conversations. This community visioning project is intended to bring together citizens of the entire watershed to gather data about their collective ideas or visions for the future of the lands of the watershed. The information gathered will be a valuable tool to assist local town and municipal governments in creating comprehensive plans that are responsive to the public they serve. Let me tell you why I think this project is so important.

Once there was a river valley that paid little attention to the value of its waters and productive farmlands. The farms were sold off for housing or manufacturing, abandoned buildings left to crumble. People didn't seem to care much about the place they lived, or maybe they just didn't think there was anything they could do to stop "progress" in their small town. Change came in many forms, with little thought to the real price the community was paying. The river became so polluted with toxic wastes that it actually burst into flames. The beautiful region, with rolling tree-covered hills and broad valleys, and not a small amount of important American history, became an ecological nightmare. The National Park Service moved in and declared it a park in order to protect it. Many people were forced to sell their homes to the government.

Now, 30 years later, the river is recovering and supports some fish, and the government is working hard to bring life back to the land by turning over the farms—with improvements to structures and some conservation prac-

tices in place—to young farmers on a long-term contract basis. The Park Service now understands that land is better served by the good stewardship of the people who live there. This painful lesson was learned in the Cuyahoga River Valley and the little town where I grew

“Working with neighbors to address our needs and concerns about the future may well be the most meaningful work any of us can do.”

up, Peninsula, Ohio. Here in the Kickapoo we have had a taste of federal projects, a rather bad taste in fact, with the La Farge Dam. Perhaps the lesson is "If you want something done right, do it yourselves."

There are some places that stand out as unique in their natural beauty and ecological diversity. The driftless area of Wisconsin is one of these. If we, the people who live here, can band together and work to solidify our dreams for the area—how we want it to look, how we want it to serve our needs, and also how we can protect the environmental aspects of its uniqueness—then we will have learned something from the often tragic history of beautiful places.

Stepping up to an active role, looking at the big picture, and working with neighbors to address our needs and concerns about the future may well be the most meaningful work any of us can do. It is just that sort of work that the Valley Stewardship Network (VSN) is asking each and every one of us to do by taking part in the "Kickapoo Conversations — Vision 2020" project this winter. Beginning in January 2003 and planned to go

through April, a monthly series of community gatherings is planned to be held simultaneously in four different watershed locations. (See p. 3 Calendar for details) Community visioning—looking at where we've been, where we are now and where we'd like to be in the year 2020 and citizen ideas for how we can get to that place—will be the topics for discussion. Neutral facilitators will conduct the discussions. The format will be to take in as many separate ideas as possible. We want to hear from everyone. At the conclusion of the sessions, proceedings will be transcribed and a report will be produced that can serve as valuable and much-needed public input for comprehensive planning tasks being undertaken by many of the local governments in the valley. Please make every effort to participate in this important undertaking. Each voice is important in a democracy and will be heard.

VSN is extending an invitation to every resident of the watershed area to participate in the exciting task of steering a course for the region. Kickapoo Conversations is not intended to be a debate about zoning or status quo topics. It is structured to be a positive environment in which to look to the future with our best ideas and hopes for what may develop there. Please become part of the effort. You can call the office 608/637-3615 for more information, or watch the web site for details. Also, please consider sending along your membership or renewal contribution now to help us with this large scale project. Thanks.

First Conversation set for:

Saturday, January 18, 2003,
9:30 to Noon, at a site near you!



WASTE PIT OPPOSITION: VSN encourages the citizens of the watershed to remain active in their opposition to the permitting of United Liquid Waste Recycling for a liquid waste lagoon in Vernon County. The need for a complete Environmental Impact Statement process is not being met by the DNR as of this writing. The project is not within the Kickapoo Watershed; however, we see the precedent created as a threat to the land, water and quality of life of the entire region.

Fundraising: Building on Successes

VSN memberships are approaching 100; general contributions totaled \$3,385 for last fiscal year, ending in June. We thank all of the people who are contributing financially and with their valuable time to further the goals of sustainability and good stewardship of the Kickapoo Watershed.

This summer we received a generous contribution of \$10,000 from a Wisconsin family foundation that supports natural resource conservation and community building, and prefers to remain anonymous. This support will be used to cover general operating costs and launch this winter's community outreach project, "Kickapoo Conversa-

tions." (see cover story)

Even with careful budgeting, we will need to raise an additional \$4,500 by June 30, 2003 to accomplish a minimum level of activities in our program areas including water quality monitoring, Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping and updating of natural resource inventories.

There are over 20,000 adults calling some portion of the watershed home. We at VSN maintain that if a good percentage of you, as well as businesses and other organizations, invested in our educational and community service efforts, we could in turn better serve community

information needs in developing plans for the future. In return, local investors would see the benefits of uniting and strengthening communications in the Kickapoo Watershed community as we all work to secure the future of our resources. The issues of change we face are complex. It is the hope of VSN to help the watershed community work cooperatively in finding sustainable ways to address these issues.

Please take the time today to drop a check in the mail. Contributions are tax deductible and will support information gathering and distribution, community activities and research here in the valley. Thank you.

Bio-Assessment Walk: Info Gathering

VSN has begun a new bio-assessment service. Additional funding will allow us to expand this service. By walking clients' lands we hope to guide them in good land stewardship in the Kickapoo Watershed with special attention given to wildlife habitat, biodiversity, threatened species and habitats, invasive species, and erosion control. Clients receive a report detailing VSN suggestions and additional resources. Information from these land walks can be used in constructing a current vegetation map of the Kickapoo Watershed. This can help landowners identify how the stewardship of their lands affects neighboring wildlife corridors and forest patches. All information is strictly confidential be-

tween VSN and the land owner.

Margaret Thielke, VSN Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and Water Quality Monitor volunteer, and Josh Leonard, VSN Project Coordinator, visited Misty Ridge Farm on Sunday, Oct. 6 for VSN's first bio-assessment project. Owners Rick and Judy Williams won this service at our Kickapoo Celebration drawing. They raise market vegetables and grass-fed Jerseys for beef on 160 acres of mostly grazed pasture with about 8 acres of woods.

Josh and Margaret toured the farm with Rick and Judy and saw their woods and pastures. The woods run along a dry-wash whose source is runoff from surrounding fields. A storm-water detention pond is at the "head" of the creek. Rick and Judy reported that they had seen wildlife rang-

ing from eagles to toad populations "migrating" to the detention pond during mating season.

Our report provided some guidance to the Williams on expanding the pond for additional wildlife habitat and erosion control, shoring up banks, and managing their woods for wildlife habitat. They already have a number of habitats and their farm demonstrates great land stewardship.



A Call For Water Quality Monitors

Fishing enthusiasts and others can get to know their waters as citizen water quality monitors. Contact Paul Krahn, 637-5478, to learn how you can be trained in identifying macroinvertebrates (trout food) and other indicators of a healthy stream.

VSN Board: Chair: **Lynn Chakoian**, 637-2060, chakoian@waysmeet.org; Treasurer, **Howard Duckman**, 637-6742, mmtfarm@frontiernet.net; Secretary, **Kathy Neidert**, 624-3281, kninwi@yahoo.com; **Paul Krahn**, 637-5478, paul-krahn@wi.nacdn.net; **Pat Conway**, 435-6743, pat@pro-eco.org; **Jack Knight**, 735-4287.

Advisory Board: Gary Eldred, Prairie Enthusiasts; Dr. Rob Horwich, Community Conservation; Ben Logan, Author; Dr. Paul Stoelting, UW La Crosse; and Tom Weston, First National Bank, Viroqua.



"If you don't understand the importance of water, go without it for a day. If you still don't understand it, go without it for four days."

-Walter Bresette



Annual Membership Meeting Establishes Priorities

The June 12 Membership Meeting at WWTC in Viroqua was well attended by a core group of active VSN members. In addition to finances and staff activities, program activity reports were presented by Paul Krahn, Water Monitoring; Margaret Thielke, GIS Mapping; Josh Leonard, Biological Inventories; and Kathy Fairchild, Comprehensive Planning. Denise Buckbee reported on the success of the "Voices of the Valley" poetry book project and the web site she and Howard Duckman developed.

Lynn Chakoian facilitated a discussion of organizational priorities, and members were asked to rank program priorities for staff and funding purposes. Tabulation of these rankings created the following priorities:

- 1 - **Comprehensive Planning Support:** facilitate public participation, GIS maps;
- 2 - **Organizational Development:** communications & web site, members ;
- 2 - **Stewardship Education:** (tied for 2nd) events & materials



- 3 - **Water Monitoring:** chemical & biological health of water;
- 4 - **Biological Inventories:** identify plants, animals & ecosystems to aid in management and conservation.

Large format GIS maps and other conservation materials were displayed. The meeting adjourned to refreshments, conversation and getting a close look at those beautiful maps!

Grazing News

Cows in streams can *help* stream quality! A Joel McNair article in the March, 2002 *Graze*, from Belleville, WI, challenges conventional conservation wisdom. Ralph Lentz's farm along Sugarloaf Creek, MN has been divided into three sections: A, B, and C. His goal is to balance a productive beef grazing operation with the best system for a trout stream. Section C has a mature stand of hardwoods along the stream banks and is fenced off from cattle. Since the 1980's Section B has been in grasses and grazed

for one intensive period every 2 - 3 years. Section A has been grazed every month for two to three days by 40 cow-calf pairs (management intensive grazing, MIG).

Results: The wooded Section C is broad and shallow with a muddy bottom and turbid water. The bare banks eroded during flood periods. Section B is banked by thick growths of grass and the stream is narrower and deeper; water flows fast and clear. Section A is similar to B except slightly fewer fish and less plant diversity. However, "A" produces more beef than "B". For a free sample copy of *Graze*, contact graze@mhtc.net.

Calendar

Nov. 8-10: Rivers 2002-A Watershed Event., Rosholt, WI.

Nov. 14: Mississippi Valley Conservancy Annual Meeting at the Pump House in La Crosse (608) 784-3606

Nov. 16: Water Celebration 9:00-3:30 UW Richland Campus, contact Peggy Compton (608) 342-1633; peggy.compton@ces.uwex.edu

Nov. 16: Timber Stand Improvement Paul Bader, Kickapoo Woods Cooperative, 625-2515; domehome@mwt.net

Nov. 20: VSN Board Meeting at the WWTC building 220 S. Main Street, Viroqua at 6:30 PM. All are welcome!

Dec. 7: Prairie Restoration with the Mississippi Valley Conservancy (608) 784-3606

Dec. 18: VSN Board Meeting, WWTC Viroqua—6:30.

Check out our *new* website at www.kickapoovsn.org!

Jan. 18, 2003: Kickapoo Conversations, 1 of 4: Ontario, La Farge, Avalanche (tentative) & Gays Mills, 9:00—noon

Jan. 15: VSN Board Meeting, WWTC Viroqua—6:30.

Feb. 15, Kickapoo Conversations, 2 of 4: Ontario, La Farge, Avalanche (tentative) & Gays Mills, 9:00—noon

Feb. 19: VSN Board Meeting, WWTC Viroqua—6:30

Mar. 15, Kickapoo Conversations, 3 of 4: Ontario, La Farge, Avalanche (tentative) & Gays Mills, 9:00—noon.

State Rivers Event

2003 has been proclaimed as the "International Year of Freshwater" by the United Nations and proposed as "The Year of Water" in Wisconsin.

An upcoming statewide conference, *Rivers 2002 - A Watershed Event*, is scheduled Nov. 8-10 near Stevens Point, WI and is sponsored by the River Alliance of Wisconsin and a host of other local and state organizations, including VSN. The conference will bring together more than 125 representatives of Wisconsin organizations, tribes and agencies concerned with local watershed protection.

Participants will develop an action plan for Wisconsin's watersheds for the next three years. In addition, the conference will offer hands-on workshops and sessions related to watershed use and protection. The conference is open to anyone interested in watershed protection, use and water recreation. For more information, please contact Diana Toledo of the River Alliance at 608-257-2424 or see www.wisconsinrivers.org.

New Coordinator

VSN has named Josh Leonard of rural Soldiers Grove as its new Project Coordinator. He replaces Denise Buckbee who has returned to fulltime teaching.

As Project Coordinator of VSN, he networks with other conservation groups, staffs the VSN office, and serves the organization's Board and membership. "I am thrilled to become more involved with VSN," said Leonard, who moves up from being an active member of the non-profit group. "VSN's grassroots, people-focused approach in land stewardship offers an ideal blend of people, conservation, and education."



Leonard received his bachelor of science degree *cum laude* in ecology, evolution, and behavior from the University of Minnesota. During the 1999-2000 academic year he studied wildlife ecology in Tanzania. Currently, he also teaches Spanish part time at Pleasant Ridge Waldorf School and the Youth Initiative High School, both in Viroqua.

Valley Stewardship Network, Inc.

220 Airport Rd
Viroqua, WI 54665
608-637-3615
vsn@frontiernet.net

Non-Profit
U.S. Postage
PAID
Viroqua, WI
Permit No. 73



Please let us know if you would prefer to be removed from our mailing list.



Valley Stewardship Network — Watershed citizenship for all who live, work & play in the Kickapoo Valley

Complete annual membership form below.
If you have not renewed for 2003, please do so now. Thank you!

Yes, Count Me In! I support VSN's goals of promoting stewardship and sustainable living in the Kickapoo Watershed.

- VALLEY STEWARDS....\$15 - \$25 WATERSHED SUSTAINERS....\$60
- VISIONARIES....\$100 BUSINESS or ORGANIZATIONAL MEMBERSHIP \$50 - \$200

I WISH TO MAKE AN ADDITIONAL DONATION OF \$_____ to support this important work.

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Thank You

All contributions are tax deductible.

Make checks payable to Valley Stewardship Network (VSN), 220 Airport Rd. Viroqua, WI 54665.