



The Valley Stewardship Network, Inc. a not for profit 501(c)(3)

# Kickapoo Visions

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

www.kickapoovsn.org

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## Agriculture as Culture

By Kathy Fairchild

The Program on Agricultural Technology Studies (PATS) at UW-Madison informs us that “the demand for rural housing and recreational land development has resulted in a dramatic acceleration in the rate of farmland conversion to non-farm uses over the last 15 years.” This is not news to the citizens of the Kickapoo valley. Here, the percentage of sold land converted to non-farm use has nearly doubled in the last ten years, with Crawford and Vernon counties reaching some of the highest levels in the state. From 1995-1999, Crawford County led the watershed with a 45% conversion rate (a statistic noted by PATS as probably underreported). And according to the U.S. Census of Agriculture, Vernon County lost more than 150 farms in the five years from 1992-1997.

While new landowners bring many positive changes, farmland removed from production is not usually seen as one of them. Nearly every town in the valley, and most in Wisconsin for that matter, started as an agriculture service center for early farm families. Clearly, times are changing, and change is raising questions.

- What can we do to reverse decline in our agricultural community?
- How can we protect farmland and encourage young farmers?
- Can a non-farming population maintain the highly valued quality of life that was created by generations of farming families?

These questions are being asked not only here, but all across the country, as fewer farmers are each working more land, raising more stock and striving to balance growth and stability for their operations

As of 1997, 60 percent of the Southwest District that includes the Kickapoo

was still in farming. But Jim Radke, Vernon County NRCS Agent, tells us that of the 207,000 acres of cropland in the county, only 15 percent would qualify by any of the usual conservation standards as “prime” farmland. American Farmland Trust expertise and dollars from state bond issues that have helped other areas of the nation to preserve operating farms may not be tools we can use here. But there are other alternatives and areas to explore. For instance, Michael Holton at the Center for Rural Affairs in Walthill, Nebraska writes in the CFRA newsletter of many exciting programs that are being tried there. ([www.cfra.org](http://www.cfra.org))

Based on ideas developed in the Kickapoo Conversations, VSN would like to see the formation of a Watershed Ag Issues Committee. Composed of valley residents, especially farmers, business people and members of the financial community, this committee would work together to define common issues and to develop common solutions. The group could also provide the needed advocacy to create alternatives to Federal Farm Bill programs that do not provide much benefit to small- and mid-sized farms. Value added products, marketing alliances, ownership transitions and group health insurance could be some of the topics addressed. The urgency of this issue should be enough for farmers to put aside their historic independence and draw together to seek solutions. The many levels of benefit we can realize by preserving and protecting farming as a way of life—economic, cultural, aesthetic, environmental and more—all point to the need for individuals to work together to find a way to make it happen. To express interest in the Ag Issues group, please contact the VSN office at 637-3615.



## Caring for Kickapoo Forests

By Lila Marmel

The Kickapoo Woods Cooperative (KWC) is improving the health, value, and beauty of our forests by providing educational, forestry and marketing services in the greater Kickapoo region. Over a century of profit-based forestry has removed many of the healthiest trees, reduced diversity, left soils vulnerable to erosion and negatively affected water quality.

KWC's strategy is to work with landowners, public and private foresters, loggers, sawmill operators and secondary wood manufacturers in the region to create a broad, positive impact from the co-op's activities on the local forest industry and community residents. We are assisting forest owners to enhance the ecological and economic value of their woodlands, to generate income from their forests through selective harvesting, processing and marketing, and to create community benefits through locally based economic development and job creation. KWC contracts with forest practitioners that meet our training requirements in safe and sustainable forestry practices to work in our members' woods. The co-op intends to comply with Forest Stewardship Council principles for responsible forestry, which include commitments to the well-being of the forests, landowners and the local community.

KWC's newest service is tool rental. Members can rent loppers, manual or motorized pole saws, measuring tools, and the Farmi winch, which will pull logs out of the woods using the PTO on your tractor.

Educational events are presented year

*(Continued on page 3 as 'Forests')*

## Who is in your backyard? By Gary Thompson

Adapted from "A Bird's Eye View," Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, Des Moines, IA.

It's that time of the year again! Summer has passed us by, ending with hot scorching days, only to usher in cool crisp mornings and comfortable breezy days. Fall is one of my favorite times of the year. We often enjoy the obvious benefits of this season, the colorful foliage and the abundance of the harvest. But have you noticed the transients? Yes, there are others besides Grandma and Grandpa who have southern climes on their minds.

More than half the bird species that breed in North America spend part of every year in warmer climates. That means that 350 species that nest in Canada and the U.S. make a long journey thousands of miles to their winter homes in the tropics of Mexico, Central America, South America and the Caribbean. These birds are known as Neotropical migrants. A growing number of these birds

are in trouble! Some species populations have declined by as much as 75% in the last 25 years. Nineteen of these Neotropicals that nest in Midwestern states have been identified as endangered or threatened. Local Neotropicals include the Brown Thrasher and the Belles Vireo.

The Kickapoo River Watershed provides critical foraging, nesting and breeding habitat and is a part of the greater Upper Mississippi River bluffland region. These blufflands that tower over an abundant supply of water, provided by the regions many tributaries, are a key migratory route. With continual pressures from agriculture and development comes an increased impact on vital



Brown Thrasher - Photo courtesy of www.yankeegardner.com

habitat. If we do not consider how we can improve or manage the remaining habitat, through sound environmental stewardship practices, we may lose an important part of these unique biological systems. The three primary threats include loss of existing habitat, fragmentation, and changes in quality.

But there is hope! Over 90% of the bluffland region is forested lands that are privately owned. That's where we can make a difference as stewards of that which has been entrusted to us! Please consider what you can do to help these part-time residents of our backyards. For more information on how you can maintain or improve habitat on your property, contact Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, Audubon Society, WI DNR, or myself at VSN.

## Kickapoo Conversations

### What's Happening Now?

By Josh and Jeremy

As lifestyles in our area continue to change, we can choose our future through comprehensive planning or let it happen to us without a plan.

Earlier this year more than 220 concerned local citizens devoted time and energy to help realize a desirable future for the Kickapoo Watershed. Last June VSN published the Kickapoo Conversations Report as an inspirational tool for local comprehensive planning efforts.

The report includes a step-by-step instructional guide on developing a comprehensive plan for your township, village, or city. The participants' Vision for our area in the year 2020 is presented in the second section and on our website. The report demonstrates how participants

developed their ideas and created action plans for realizing these ideas. Some plans with active support include increasing CREP awareness and enrollment, a community radio station, establishing a dark sky preserve around Wildcat Mountain State Park and creating an agricultural steering committee to focus on issues related to farming. If you are an *active farmer*, please call VSN to join this committee.

VSN volunteers are presenting the report to the boards of all 48 units of government in our watershed. Volunteers have enjoyed positive responses from governmental board members. Some boards are well prepared for planning and others are just starting their comprehensive planning work. Volunteers are also distributing the reports to libraries, schools, and governmental agencies active in the Kickapoo Valley. VSN extends a hearty "thank you" to those pro-

moting the value of comprehensive planning for inevitable change. Please contact us if you are interested in a copy of this useful and exciting report or if you are able to help in distribution to others.

VSN congratulates the 12 units of government, known as the Vernon County Grant Group, who are now designing public input surveys. The Kickapoo Conversations Report proved valuable in developing their strategies.

If you are interested in any of the above opportunities or just want more information, please call the VSN office at 637-3615 or visit our website at [www.kickapoovsn.org](http://www.kickapoovsn.org).

### Kickapoo Conversations Report for only \$5

Stop by VSN or call to get your copy. Read what neighbors think about the future of the watershed! Learn to plan!

#### VSN Board:

**Jack Knight**, Co-chair, 735-4287, [c/o\\_vsn@frontiernet.net](mailto:c/o_vsn@frontiernet.net)  
**Pat Conway**, Co-chair, 435-6743, [pat@pro-eco.org](mailto:pat@pro-eco.org)  
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**Gary Thompson**, 637-3650, [gatwwtc@hotmail.com](mailto:gatwwtc@hotmail.com)



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**Kathy Fairchild**, Program Manager  
**Jeremy Lopez**, Projects Coordinator

## Amish Concerns Over "Smart Growth"

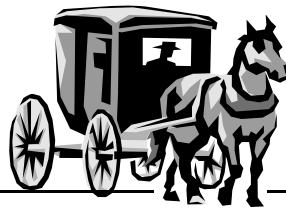
By Pat Conway, VSN Co-chair

The Kickapoo Conversations, sponsored by VSN, were intended to "let every voice be heard." No one from the Amish community attended the meetings, but Atlee Miller, the bishop for the Cashton community wrote me a letter to express the views of most Amish in our area.

When it comes to positive improvements in the quality of rural life through economic development projects or sustainable agriculture programs, the Amish are supportive. Although their religion does not allow them to participate in government-sponsored projects such as Smart Growth planning, they see the value of such programs for their non-Amish neighbors. Their concern, per Bishop Miller, is that new statewide zoning laws around housing codes and

outhouse permits will threaten their future in Wisconsin. In Bishop Miller's letter he states the greatest concern of the Amish would be: "building regulations and zoning that would be objective to our religious beliefs."

The Kickapoo watershed has the highest concentration of Amish in our state. In keeping with its mission, VSN will continue to support communication and coordination among groups in the watershed. The interests and concerns of the Amish community are an important element to be incorporated into the comprehensive planning process.



## Thank You to Members and Donors

VSN continues to pursue multiple funding sources for our 2003 and 2004 field activities. Generous support from members has made it possible for us to publish and distribute the Kickapoo Conversations Report, continue the water monitoring activities, develop a bio-inventorying strategy, and to develop our communications network across the watershed.

We very much want to thank those who have contributed just since our last newsletter and look forward to hearing from them and others in the months to come.

### Memberships & Special Support:

Dail Murray, Bill Turner, Jeremy Lopez, Bud and Katie Lemley, Susan Blaustein, Jerry and Alice Boehm, Gordon and Olga Browning, Kate Hale, Tom Wilson, John and Diane Craig, LaVern Dobbs, Betty Bland, Todd Os-

man, Jerry and Liz Quebe, Barb Schiefer, Carol Hagerman, Gary Thompson, Darlene Evans, Brenda Lewison, Marcia Halligan, Teddy Schoville, Violet Prihoda and Dick Smith, Kathy Fairchild, Greg Wahl, Larry Schoenemann, Josh Leonard, Karen Dahl, Terry Beck, LaVerne Cambell and Janet Kruk.

### 'Forests' (Continued from page 1)

round. We import instructors from the Forest Industry Safety Training Association (FISTA) to teach chainsaw safety as often as necessary to provide for all who wish to take it. Coming up this fall we will have 2 introductory woods walks in October, Chainsaw Safety Training October 25, Care of Young Plantations November 6, Timberstand Improvement December 6, and Writing a Land Management Plan in January of 2004 (call for exact date).

For information on events, membership, services, or the tool rental program, contact Paul Bader, 608-625-2515, domehome@mwt.net, or by mail at KWC, PO Box 71, La Farge WI 54639.

## Calendar of Events

**Oct. 11: Woods Walk.** Kickapoo Woods Co-op. Call Jack Knight at 735-4287.

**Oct. 11: Watercolor and Drawing Workshop.** Call the Reserve at 625-2960.

**Oct. 12: Gaia Harvest Fest.** At Snowflake Ski Resort, Westby. Local music, crafts, info and benefit for Community Radio. Advance tickets \$10/12 at the gate. Kids FREE. Call VSN for info.

**Oct. 14 & 15: Stream Corridor Improvement Workshop**—Dodgeville, WI. Call VSN for more info.

**Oct. 15: VSN Board Meeting.** WWTC, Viroqua - 7:00 PM. All are welcome.

**Oct. 17 - 19: Trail Symposium**—With Gene Wood, PhD. Contact the Reserve for more information at 625-2960.

**Oct. 17: Woods Walk.** Kickapoo Woods Co-op. Call Jack Knight at 735-4287.

**Oct. 25: Chainsaw Safety Workshop.** presented by Kickapoo Woods Co-op, pre-register with Paul Bader at 625-2515.

**Nov. 8: Geology Hike in the Kickapoo Valley Reserve** with Mr. Hatfield. Fee. Call the Reserve for info 625-2960.

**Nov. 19: VSN Board Meeting.** WWTC, Viroqua - 7:00 PM. All are welcome.

**Dec. 6: Timberstand Improvement.** Call the Reserve for information at 625-2960.

**Dec. 17: VSN Board Meeting.** WWTC, Viroqua - 7:00 PM. All are welcome.

**Jan. 10: Winterfest.** Celebrate at the Reserve and Wildcat Mt. State Park. Candlelight ski/hike and other events - all day. Call the Reserve for more information at 625-2960.

**Jan. 21: VSN Board Meeting.** WWTC, Viroqua - 7:00 PM. All are welcome.

**Feb. 18: VSN Board Meeting.** WWTC, Viroqua - 7:00 PM. All are welcome.

**Feb. 26 - 28: Upper Midwest Organic Farming Conference.** La Crosse, WI. Call VSN for more information.

**Mar. 17: VSN Board Meeting.** WWTC, Viroqua - 7:00 PM. Think Green.

**ALL PHONE NUMBERS ARE IN THE (608) AREA CODE UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED.**

### VSN WISH LIST

Folding table; paper cutter; scanner, brochure holder, new members — please call if you can help.



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**All contributions are tax deductible.**

*Thank You*

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



## Kickapoo Water Quality

VSN is proud to report water quality improvement on three tributaries to the Kickapoo River. Tainter Creek and McGraw Creek (Franklin Township) both have been upgraded from a Class II stream to a Class I brown trout stream for their entire length. Weister Creek (Clinton, Whitestown and Stark Townships) has been upgraded from a Class II brook trout stream to a Class I stream, having sufficient natural reproduction to sustain populations of wild trout.

VSN welcomes are newest water monitors, Liz and Jerry Quebe (Trout Creek in Crawford Co.), Ron Uhe and Dan Odonnell (Sherry Creek in Vernon Co.) and Bill Hagerman (Kickapoo River in Vernon Co.)

VSN would like to thank **Paul Krahn** for his efforts over the past three years serving on the VSN Board and as coordinator of the volunteer water monitors. Paul has lead informative meetings with plant identification seminars, pertinent stream issue updates as well as an-

swering technical water monitoring questions. VSN is currently looking for someone to work with Paul to transition into a leadership role with the volunteer water monitors.

**Chuck Hatfield** of rural La Farge has been nominated for a Wisconsin Stream Monitoring Award for his outstanding efforts in public and peer education of water quality issues and for his long term dedication to water quality data collection on both Bear Creek and Brush Creek. VSN is proud to sponsor Chuck's nomination. The award is adjudicated by the WI DNR and the UW-Ext. and will be announced on National Water Monitoring Day, Oct. 18<sup>th</sup>.

### Open Position:

Valley Stewardship is looking for a volunteer Water Monitor Coordinator with good organizational and people skills. Biology background preferred. Opportunities include: Getting to know the Kickapoo Watershed through organizing interactive meetings with existing water monitors and researching stream quality issues. Training provided by our outgoing coordinator. Call VSN today!!

## New Coordinator

Jeremy Lopez of Viroqua is the new project coordinator of VSN. He succeeds Josh Leonard who recently moved on to fulltime teaching.

As project coordinator, Jeremy serves the organization's membership by networking with area conservation and government agencies and groups, promoting the organization's causes and activities, and running the VSN office, including database development and newsletter production.

Jeremy's extensive experience in interpersonal and community relations and computer information systems will help VSN further its goals of developing citizen collaboration and a valley resource database. As a board member of the Midtown Greenway Coalition in the Twin Cities, he helped organize and facilitate community involvement in the planning and the development of a commuter bike path through south Minneapolis. "I am delighted to be working with so many dedicated people in promoting sustainable stewardship of this beautiful watershed," said Jeremy.