



# Kickapoo Visions

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

## Where do the Herps Winter?

By Gary Thompson

“Herp” is the common abbreviated name, given by those who study them, to reptiles and amphibians. Herpetologists have gained much knowledge of these creatures by observing them in their natural habitats. Such research has given biologists a greater understanding of how to better protect and manage this important element of our complex ecosystem. These “lowly” critters are often one of the first populations looked at when assessing the health and well being of our watersheds.

VSN was contacted this past spring with a member question wondering what may have influenced local frog numbers to decline in their pond and adjacent wetlands. What would cause a previously healthy population of spring peepers and green frogs to virtually be non-existent the following spring? Bob Hay, a DNR Herp specialist, offered one explanation, “A lack of snow coverage over much of the state, coupled with bitter cold temperatures, may have caused significant numbers of frogs and turtles to freeze to death. Along with the possible deep ice penetration, we were coming off an unusually dry late summer and fall season, which coupled with cold temperatures may have contributed to a condition referred to as ‘freeze drying’.”



While we bundle up, throw another log on the fire, or head for warmer climates, herps settle into underground hibernation. They are completely dependent on their surrounding habitat and the cooperation of all the seasonal weather factors for their protection and

See *Herps* on page 2

## Citizen Monitoring Conference

By Gary Thompson and Jeremy Lopez

Gary Thompson and Jeremy Lopez attended the 2004 Citizen Monitoring Conference in Madison on August 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup>. Hosted by the DNR, the conference included everything from citizen amphibian surveyors to worm watchers, transmission line representatives, waste water treatment managers, concerned citizens, university professors and DNR and other state agency staff. The basic premise was to help the DNR figure out how to better use the wealth of data collected in their more than 150 monitoring programs. During these times of limited funding, DNR doesn’t have the staff resources to monitor our natural resources; they rely on citizen-driven programs. This reality, of course, ties in nicely with the VSN Land Inventory, Water Quality Monitoring and other projects.

There were many very interesting presentations covering state, national and international monitoring programs of all types. Individuals related their experiences working with agencies and volunteers. **Everyone was trying to figure out how to make citizen data more useful to professionals and professionals more useful to citizens.** The conference was a good opportunity to network with others interested in resource monitoring. It confirmed for us the importance of Citizen Based Monitoring in the statewide resource management process. It also provided good exposure to operating programs and resources available to organizations wanting to become part of the process.

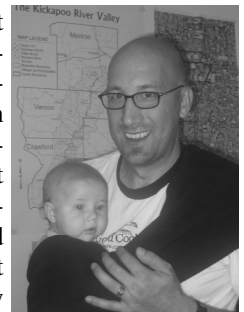
One of the highlights was information on the **Wisconsin Nature Mapping project** ([www.wisnatmap.org](http://www.wisnatmap.org)). This web

See *Conference*, page 4

## New GIS Mapping Wiz!

By Liz Quebe

Marty Larson has agreed to assist VSN with data collection and geographic information systems (GIS) mapping activities, part of VSN’s landowner outreach and mapping project funded in part by The Paul E. Stry Foundation of La Crosse, DNR River Planning Grant and The Norcross Wildlife Foundation.



Marty & Sidra

Marty recently moved to Viroqua from Le Sueur, Minnesota with wife Lisa and daughter Sidra. He holds a Bachelor of Science in Geography degree from Minnesota State University, with an emphasis on GIS and Cartography and a minor in Natural Resources Management. He recently completed his Masters in Urban Planning. As a GIS intern, he worked for the Western Slope Environmental Resource Council in Colorado, field mapping trails in support of a new recreation and access plan for three national forests.

Marty’s initial task will be to consolidate existing data sources and convert them for compatibility with DNR data with the goal of creating an environmental corridor map of the Watershed. He will also design a Landowner Survey database so that watershed landowners who provide input may receive maps and reports to help in managing their property. As data entry proceeds, Marty will be able to create maps for citizen planning groups and local units of government to assist them in land use planning.

# Water Quality Monitoring Corner

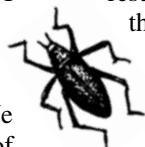
By Gary Thompson

Greetings to all who are interested in the health of our beautiful Kickapoo Watershed. It's been an interesting year thus far, weather wise. One year ago we were suffering from drought conditions that left us approximately ten inches short of our normal precipitation. The spring and summer of 2004 will most likely not be forgotten for sometime, due to heavy downpours, flash floods and saturated low lands. I for one prefer the latter over the former, but must confess I live on high ground. Whatever your perspective, our springs, seeps, wetlands, streams and rivers have benefited greatly with recharged waters. We can be thankful for the abundance of water resources that surround us at nearly every coulee we encounter within the Watershed.

## New Activities

In addition to the baseline data collected, the Kickapoo Citizen Water Monitors (KCWM) have begun a new project with a small group of monitors in

the Middle and Upper Watershed. Beginning around Memorial Day weekend, VSN along with advisors from the DNR and Land and Water Conservation Dept. (LWCD), began an extensive project monitoring bacteria levels in the main branch of the Kickapoo River. The project is being funded by LWCD along with a DNR River Planning Grant secured by VSN. It ran through the end of September and will resume again in the spring of 2005. Lab



results thus far have revealed that there is work to be done to restore our beloved "Crooked River" to the quality recreational river we all love to experience. We have been discussing possible strategies for improving water quality with the agencies involved, as well as other concerned stakeholders. This winter we will be investigating workable solutions for improving water quality. We ask all landowners, business owners, paddlers, anglers and people who love the scenic solitude of the Kickapoo to please let us know if you would like to be a part of protecting and

restoring our beautiful river.

The Water Action Volunteers, KCWM's statewide affiliate, will be introducing new programs by 2005 including crayfish surveys, macroinvertebrate wildcards, family-level macroinvertebrate identification key, bacteria monitoring pilot program and a booklet for understanding river-monitoring data.

## Thank You

We are grateful to the Kickapoo Reserve for continuing to educate people about our water resources. Recently the Reserve presented a weeklong class entitled, "Exploring the Outdoor Classroom," with a section on the importance of water quality. From this experience two individuals have agreed to join the KCWM and they will bring the total of locations being monitored within the Watershed to fourteen. We welcome our new monitors. A big thank you to our existing monitors who examine our waters for the benefit of everyone. If you would like to begin monitoring a nearby tributary, contact the VSN office. Training, equipment and support are provided. Be a part of those making a difference.

## Herps *continued from page 1*

survival. Bob adds, "In a normal winter, several species of frogs literally freeze solid. Glycol-like anti-freeze, produced by the frogs just prior to freezing, usually is enough to protect them." These small creatures stop breathing and have no detectable heartbeat until they begin to thaw the following spring. What an amazing natural phenomenon unfolding right under our feet! Bob also suggests that turtles may even suffer a more agonizing result from these same conditions. "Many turtles survive the freezing conditions only to emerge with their extremities frostbitten. When they emerge and begin to sun themselves in an attempt to heal, infections often develop which usually are fatal." People are often heard to complain about snowy winter weather, but as these scenarios point out, it may be a matter of life or death for these creatures.

The Vernon County Land and Water Conservation Department (LWCD) is

doing a streambank stabilization project now on Bishop Branch Creek that includes a herptile habitat element. VSN has played a supportive role in the collaborative project. Using grants from the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the DNR and other funding secured by Jeff Hastings, the work includes stream bank stabilization, beaver dam removal, in-stream trout habitat structures, and a Herp hibernaculum (place for hibernating). Paul Krahn of the LWCD worked with Bob Hay to design the hibernaculum into the streambank along with trout habitat structures. The design involves the layering of different size rock, which is then covered with a geo-textile fabric, which keeps silt from filling in the hibernaculum chamber. PVC pipe will be inserted into these structures allowing access to temperature loggers placed inside. This will allow for year round temperature monitoring of the habitat. We are thankful for those who work to preserve and protect the often overlooked Herps.

## Kickapoo Visions

published Spring and Fall

Valley Stewardship Network encourages, promotes and helps create opportunities for pro-active stewardship efforts in the Kickapoo River Watershed through education and awareness efforts and by promoting community pride, positive land use, compatible development and communication and coordination among watershed groups.

### Board of Directors:

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### Staff:

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

# Kickapoo Country Fair — A Great Idea, Terrific Event

By Kathy Fairchild

The last day of July provided beautiful weather in the Village of LaFarge for a wonderful gathering of residents and friends of the Kickapoo. The nearly completed Visitors Center at the Kickapoo Reserve and the new Organic Valley headquarters were showcased. Both are handsome, thoughtful buildings well-suited to the expanded activities of their occupants. Local vendors offered a variety of goods and tasty edibles; informational booths helped groups and organizations to spread the word on what they are about.

Workshops covering such things as green building and cooking all that delicious produce in your CSA box were appreciated. The booth variety was exciting-- from school groups reporting on their environmental projects, the community radio initiative, organic certification information, community-based conservation to regional organizations-- all provided evidence that this region is highly valued by those who spend time here. The meal prepared by Monique Hooker and her assistants set a new standard for what can be done with delectable, organic ingredients.

The VSN booth was great fun, too. We disturbed the peace each hour with our cowbell announcing another drawing for a variety of bluebird houses that the local cub scouts and VSN volunteers created from Nuzum's donated lumber.



The Big Bench raffle tickets sold well. Special thanks go out to the Quebes (Jerry & Liz) and Rusty Hagar who so generously built and donated the benches. Congratulations to our winners, Jack Walker and Topf Wells. In just four short hours at our booth, we gave out many copies of our *Owning Rural Lands* booklet and other VSN info, talked with lots of folks about our water monitoring, land inventorying and mapping projects and were pleased to welcome some new members as well. It was clear to us that this was a much better venue for us than the county fairs we have been part of in the past. Organic Valley and the Reserve, along with the Village of LaFarge and many others, did a terrific job in organizing a very complex event. The question remains as to how this idea will be carried on, and by whom, to create an annual event for the showcasing of ideas, issues and accomplishments here in the valley. VSN will work with others to further this annual community event.

# Calendar of Events

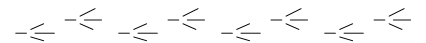
Updates, additional information and other events are listed at [www.kickapooovsn.org](http://www.kickapooovsn.org)

**Oct. 22 - 23: Grand Opening Kickapoo Valley Reserve Visitor Center.** Educational presentations, food, drink and more. Contact the Reserve at 625-2960 for info.

**Oct. 30: Chainsaw Safety Workshop.** Contact Kickapoo Woods Coop for more information at 625-2515.

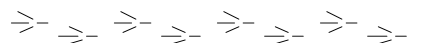
**January Winterfest** - celebrate at the Reserve and Wildcat Mt. State Park. Candlelight ski, skating, geological hikes, mutt run and more. Call the Reserve for more information at 625-2960.

**VSN Board Meetings are on the third Wednesday of each month at WWTC, 220 S. Main Street, Viroqua - 7:00 PM. Everyone is welcome.**



*"The land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land. A thing is right only when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the community."*

- Aldo Leopold



## DNR Grant

VSN has received a \$10,000 River Planning Grant from the DNR. The grant provides part of the resources necessary for more intensive water quality monitoring (see article on page 2) and for preparing and maintaining a GIS database of the Watershed. VSN is currently beginning GIS mapping that combines information from the DNR, Kickapoo Valley Reserve, and individual landowners. The grant also helps VSN's efforts to provide resource and contact information to landowners seeking to improve river, stream and streambank health.



VSN continues to pursue multiple funding sources for 2004 and 2005 activities.

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

### Memberships & Special Support:

The Drift, Nuzum's Lumber, Webster Lumber, WWTC, Viroqua Food Coop, Community Conservation,

## Thank You to Members and Donors

Karen Dahl, Janet Wissmann, Joseph Putsch, Terry Beck, Marcia Halligan, Susan and Russell Pope, Ezra S. Diman and Perry L. Nesbitt, Gordon & Olga Browning, Jerry and Liz Quebe, Mr. and Mrs. Richard A. Piehl, LaVerne Campbell, Paul Hayes, Kathy Neidert, Ron and Karene Uhe, Betty Bland, Kathy Fairchild, Lynn Chakoian, John and Mary Capehart, Richard & Marge Peters, Maggie Jones, Violet Prihoda & Dick Smith, Bryan Stanley, Sam Skemp Sr., Paul Bader, Mike and Cathy Smith, John & Diane Craig, Julie Gibson.



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*Thank You*

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*Conference continued from page 1*

based project allows people to document the location of plant and wildlife observations that are then mapped on a state level. The data can be used in natural resource management, scientific studies and environmental education. Anyone may log on and record observations simply by clicking on a location map. Three user levels provide for differing data integrity-- professional, trained nature mapper or general public. Log on as general public to get a feel for the site and record data.

A common discussion theme was the need for data users and citizen data col-

lectors to work together and find creative ways to collect quality data that can be easily used. Data users need to clearly articulate what data they need and why. Citizen data collectors must follow strict collection guidelines, a "Quality Assurance Project Plan," for the data to be used for regulatory purposes. Data collected by citizen monitors can vary widely in collection method and output data formats. It was interesting to note that this problem is not just about citizen data versus DNR data, but exists within the DNR, between EPA and DNR, etc. We heard often, "the data collected just does not talk." Many state and national initiatives are working to improve the data

compatibility problem.

The conference concluded with the attendees creating a mission and vision statement for a citizen monitoring network and a priority list of recommendations for maintaining successful citizen monitor groups. These included creating a statewide board consisting of data collectors and data users to share information, identify monitoring priorities, monitoring funds and DNR data gaps. **The recommendations were presented to DNR.** View the recommendations, proceedings and presentations at [www.atribweb.info/conference/](http://www.atribweb.info/conference/).

**Pleasant Ridge Waldorf School's Land Raffle.** Win 9 scenic acres of land near Viroqua. The ridge parcel with meadow and woods is protected by covenants describing residential, personal recreation and organic agriculture land use.

Tickets \$50, proceeds benefit PRWS, drawing is on Dec. 3, 2004. For more information call 637-7828 or visit: [www.pleasantridgewaldorf.org](http://www.pleasantridgewaldorf.org).



*"How monotonous the sounds of the forest would be if the music came only from the Top Ten birds."*

- Dan Bennett

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