



Kickapoo Visions

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

Testing the Waters

E. coli in the Kickapoo

By Jeremy Lopez

Kickapoo Citizen Water Monitors (KCWM), consisting of 27 active volunteers, are keeping a close eye on the waters flowing in our valley. These dedicated citizens have done more than ever this year by expanding the E. coli bacteria monitoring project to include the West Fork and participating in two pilot projects, collaborating with the DNR to help assess water quality. All of this is in addition to the Water Action Volunteer monitoring of tributaries to the Kickapoo and maintaining the original E. coli bacteria monitoring of the Kickapoo. VSN extends a special thank-you to Gary Thompson who recently stepped down from the VSN Board to dedicate himself to coordinating these many projects.

E. coli Bacteria Monitoring

KCWM recently completed the third year of comprehensive bacteria data collection on the Upper and Middle Kickapoo. The consistently high levels of E. coli and other bacteria appear to be common and not the result of the unusually heavy rains such as those experienced during the first year of the project. In samples not affected by a rain event, the average bacteria count found in the Kickapoo would close a typical swimming beach. The average for all sample days is much higher due to the extremely large amounts of bacteria found in waters muddied by runoff. The Kickapoo is not in danger of being officially closed because the water is not classified as recreational. Regardless of classification, health risks exist. VSN has presented these findings to the Vernon County and Monroe County Health Departments.

Is more bacteria in the water today? Unfortunately, we do not have comprehensive data from previous years, so it is

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Economic Impacts

By Kathy Fairchild

In recent weeks I've seen Al Gore's film about global warming, traveled a bit to western Canada and back at home, attended an economic development roundtable. They seemed to be unrelated activities at first, but the more I think on it, experiences are always somehow cumulative and interrelated. I'm glad that rising ocean levels won't inundate us, but know that it's possible that the Great Lakes region will be a prime destination for those displaced as climate and seasons change. Our water is already being touted as a globally unique resource. The lack of rain in the Pacific Northwest was enough of a climate change to prevent the salmon run this year, according to the Ranger at Olympic National Park. No salmon spawn, along with hard times in the timber industry, made for a pretty bleak local economy. The scenery remains unique and breathtaking, however, so tourism continues. And now the Vernon Economic Development Association (VEDA) is asking for ideas on how to best serve the needs of regional economic development. There are lessons here somewhere.

Tourism is seen as a growth area for the Kickapoo economy. We've all seen the numbers. Spending by visitors, anglers and general tourists on their way to somewhere contributes mightily to our local economy. We look like a farming region still, even though we are going through big changes here and nationally in that regard. Fifty percent of the national population used to live on farms; today it's less than 1 percent. As this change occurs, it is up to our communities to try to transition from what they have always known to how things need to be. Folks need to look around and see what it is that they value here, and strategize ways to preserve and protect those elements. Many in our area

are doing just that; it's part of planning for the future. The VSN Kickapoo Conversations project did some of that work for the Kickapoo Watershed. Local art festivals, folk schools and alternative radio are some of the community building activities from that project that have been brought to reality. VEDA is working to strengthen the local economy; their work involves visioning and planning, too. Every choice must be judged for short and long term impacts as we work to build a durable, smaller-scale, localized economy.

In the trade-off of land for dollars, the potential loss of productive farmland, scenic views, natural habitat, water quality, air quality and more is a major concern. Such losses are certainly likely when an area experiences largely unregulated development and residential expansion. Change is what happens; you never know what might be next but you can try to be ready with general ways to respond. However, unless a threat is obvious and immediate, it is historically a very difficult move from

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"We've spent the last hundred years growing the scale of our enterprise. Now we're beginning to reach the limitations of that growth. I think we're going to spend the next hundred years learning how to make enterprise smaller."

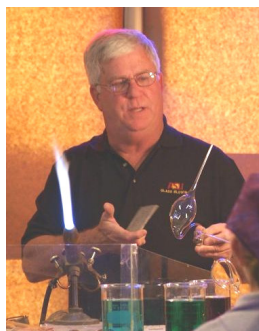
Bill McKibben,
The End of Nature



VSN Welcomes Mike Wheeler and Joe Swanson

Mike and LaNah Wheeler grew up in Madison but spent the past 32 years living near Phoenix Arizona. Mike worked in the UW-Madison Department of Chemistry glassblowing facility for seven years before moving to Arizona where he continued blowing glass for 32 years at Arizona State University. He retired in 2004.

In May of this year, they moved to Soldiers Grove on a permanent basis. Family in Madison afforded frequent visits to southern Wisconsin over those years, including visits to the driftless area. In 1995, they began looking for a vacation spot to get away from the desert summer heat. In March of 2000, they bought property along the Kickapoo River. By January they had installed a small log



cabin to make visits more comfortable and today they are in the process of adding additional space. They are absolutely in awe of the beauty of the Kickapoo watershed. The variety of trees, plants, wildlife, and birds keeps them constantly appreciating the life that surrounds us all.

Mike and LaHah have three daughters, and five (plus one due in March) grandchildren, all living in the Phoenix or San Diego areas. Mike stated, "We hope we can survive being away from the grandchildren. Last week my three-year-old grandson called to ask if he could come for a sleep over. It felt like I was being stabbed in the heart."

Joe Swanson

Joe Swanson lives with his wife Rosanne above Avalanche. Raised in Minnesota, he attended the University of Minnesota where he became bored with the bloated educational system. Joe took several years off to work with migrant laborers in Florida, North Carolina, and California as a member of VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America). He spent two years paying his debt to the selective service board working in a sheltered residence with mentally-handicapped young

adults. He met Rosanne while in VISTA and they eventually decided to escape to rural America to live a more sedentary life. After living in Montana for a couple of years, they decided the western beauty was somewhat outweighed by the forest fires, lack of rain, and abundance of people with guns in their trucks. They found rural Wisconsin by accident, raised their children, who of course having experienced scenic beauty early in life, moved to greener pastures such as New York City. The perception of parental failure was recently diminished by the return of their eldest son.

Joe spent several years working with others on the "Energy Project," which explored alternative energy and its practical application in the Kickapoo Valley. He served as town board chair for ten years and is a board member of the Santa Teresa Sister City Project in Nicaragua which is dedicated to sustainable living in Central America. Having recently joined the VSN board Joe is very much looking forward to working with others to keep the watershed and region economically and environmentally strong while preserving the resources that make it so.

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no land use regulation, and the laissez faire approach, to a level of meaningful regulation that creates protection for all. Recognizing that we have choices is part of the inspiration for planning and a well-conceived land use plan.

Many a citizen may in the near future complain to their local government about the new junk yard, mobile home site, confined animal operation, or worse that is threatening their property values, expecting them to make it go away. They will be dismayed to learn that while they are free to do whatever they want with their property, alas, that also applies to their neighbors. To benefit as a group, the group needs to accept the security of land use guidelines. Simple land subdivision regulations would help if they contained the needed language to protect water quality, avoid steeply sloped sites and protect contiguous wildlife habitat. A few years ago I heard people joke about the bulls eye developers put on maps of this area when they were looking for quick and easy

places to turn a profit. Not so funny now.

We here in the Kickapoo are not the only region to suffer the downside of "being discovered" as a tourist destination or community of interest for retirees, artists or young families. The lessons of Wisconsin Dells type tackiness or sprawl outstripping land and water resources are not that hard to comprehend. This is all the land there is, how we care for it and make use of it could be the most important choices that any of us will make in our lifetime. I contend that making good choices, living lightly on the land, preserving wild habitats, protecting water quality, and setting the example for each other by being good stewards will make all the difference. I also contend that it is the most important aspect of economic development that any of us can pursue. This watershed is a very special place, let's show the world we know that and want to keep it that way. I dream of a day when it is simply understood, and supported by well thought out guidelines and rules, that we value the land, water and air as we value life itself. Indeed, life is nothing without them.

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hard to determine. Looking at the sporadic samples from the previous thirty years shows a few seriously high bacteria counts. Other streams influenced by agriculture in the state also have very high levels of E. coli bacteria. VSN recommends not swimming in muddied waters and staying out of flood waters due to possible health risks.

Advanced Water Monitoring

Seven monitors were trained by the DNR to use sophisticated equipment and protocols. These volunteers sampled waters at seven sites in our watershed, producing valuable data to be used alongside agency-collected data, to determine stream health. If this project is deemed a success, ordinary citizens in Wisconsin and in our valley will be able to help the DNR understand the changes happening to water quality in a timely manner— even with the shrinking budgets at the DNR. The first year went well

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Member Spotlight

By Harlan Englerth

Harlan and his wife Sharon own 80 acres in the Upper Kickapoo Watershed.

We are blessed! Three years ago an 80-acre property became available that I've liked as long ago as I can remember. It had been purchased in the 40's by my uncle and I've always loved the small rock cliffs along the stream that flows through the property. When my cousin decided to sell it, we received a price and terms that permitted us to purchase the property.

We've always enjoyed the outdoors and this was a unique opportunity for us to try things to see what we could do to increase the diversity and abundance of plants and wildlife. It's been fun!

Participation in a cost-sharing government program has enabled us to begin reforestation of two small areas totaling four acres. We wanted something that would provide cover and food, especially during the winter months, for a variety of animals and birds. We decided to go with a mix of plum, dogwood, cedar, oak, cherry, maple and pine.

Another four acres consisting of three different parcels were planted as a prairie, although only established three years ago, it's been a very rewarding venture. It's great to hear of people stopping to take

photos of the prairie flowers.

We've been able to put in eight to ten acres of wildlife food plots, again with the idea of trying to provide for a variety of birds and other animals. We scrounge the end-of-year clearance sales for seed and have obtained a sizeable quantity from a commercial seed company. Since we are able to plant and maintain weed control on the plots ourselves, the total financial outlay has been a fraction of the normal costs. The food plots are used! Last year several small sunflower plots were used for approximately two weeks as an apparent convention site by a variety of birds, sometimes in flocks of one hundred or more. The brassicas, clover, corn, etc. were completely harvested by turkey and other birds, squirrels, deer and others.

This last year, participation in another government program enabled the installation of a number of lunger structures along the stream to increase stream velocity, improve water quality and improve fish habitat. Our participation was admittedly not without reservation. When people are dying from lack of food and available vaccines, one must question how much of your available resources should be devoted to environmental concerns. However, with additional contributions from a conservation club and other

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VSN Seeks Projects Coordinator

The Valley Stewardship Network is currently seeking applicants for the position of Projects Coordinator. The Projects Coordinator, as the only paid staff, works directly for the Board of Directors and is responsible for the smooth running of the organization and its projects. The ideal candidate will possess excellent writing, general communication & public speaking skills; knowledge of watershed and conservation concepts; have a good mind for details; be proficient with software such as Dreamweaver, Microsoft Word, Publisher, Access and Excel; be comfortable with taking initiative to address tasks, accomplish goals and work with group decision processes; be able to attend occasional

evening meetings. Candidates with a background in grant writing, a degree in the natural sciences or non-profit management preferred but not required. Training provided. This position offers flexible work hours from 15 to 30 hours a week. Local travel required. Compensation based on experience and available funding. Position available as early as mid-winter or spring depending on candidate. Send resume and statement of interest to VSN, 124 1/2 S. Main St., Viroqua, WI 54665. For more information please visit www.kickapooovsn.org or contact VSN by phone at (608) 637-3615 or by email at vsnet@frontiernet.net.

Projects Coordinator Jeremy Lopez has enjoyed meeting all the wonderful and diverse members of VSN and looks forward to continuing involvement.

Calendar of Events

Find the most current information at:
www.kickapooovsn.org

October 28: Chainsaw Safety Seminar
Hands-on workshop co-sponsored by the Kickapoo Woods Cooperative. Class meets at 8:00 am at the Kickapoo Valley Reserve Visitor Center, cost is \$25. Call 625-2515.

January 6: Winter Festival
Celebrate with fun winter activities at the Kickapoo Valley Reserve, call 625-2960.

February 22 - 24: Upper Midwest Organic Farming Conference
An extraordinary, organic farmer-centered event, that gathers over 2,200 participants in La Crosse, WI. Call (715) 772-3153.

VSN Board Meetings are on the third Wednesday of each month at the VSN office, 124 1/2 S. Main Street, Viroqua - 7:00 PM. Everyone is welcome.

Thank You Members and Donors

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:

Crooked River Resort, Dahl Properties, Community Conservation, Hook 'n Haul, Inn Serendipity, Mickelson's Market, Nelson's Agri-Center, Kickapoo Orchards, Kickapoo Valley Reserve, Organic Valley, Paragon Associates, Vernon County Solid Waste / Recycling, Village Market, Viroqua Food Coop and Wildflower Springs Eggs.

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Valley Stewardship Network, Inc.
 124½ S. Main St.
 Viroqua, WI 54665
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www.kickapoovsn.org

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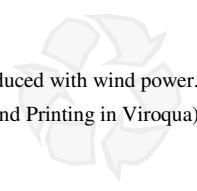
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and VSN has been awarded a grant to purchase equipment. We hope to involve even more monitors in the coming years to help provide the data necessary to properly manage the waters of the Kickapoo.

KCWM were among a select few groups in the state asked to participate in the Family Level Macroinvertebrate Identification pilot project. Citizens attended two days of training and studied to identify aquatic critters to the family level using microscopes and detailed macroinvertebrate keys. Thirteen monitors completed the training and are currently waiting for the results of their identification tests. Macroinvertebrate identification is the most accurate method for assessing water quality because analyzing aquatic bugs that cannot move large distances indicates the long-term health of the water.

With nearly 700 miles of Kickapoo watershed streams to be monitored, we can always use more help. If you are interested in learning more about the Kickapoo Citizen Water Monitors, the E. coli bacteria monitoring project or the advanced monitoring projects, please contact VSN at 637-3615.



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organizations, the financials impact on us has been minimized. I have no illusions, but I still remember the stories of when the barn was built by my grandfather on the adjacent farm (where I was raised and my mother still lives) of how my grandmother went down to the bridge below the house and caught enough northern pike in the Kickapoo River to feed the barn-raising crew for dinner. (No, I don't expect to see northern pike in the Kickapoo in my lifetime!)

Certainly, we've been privileged to be able to do what we have. We began with the availability and a price which enabled us to purchase the property, availability of government programs, donations from organizations a supportive family, time and health. Like everyone else, we believe we should do what we can to make the world a little better in some way; and there are many ways to do it. This is simply something we hope will be positive and also enjoyable and satisfying. It's a win-win situation!

Kickapoo Visions

published Spring and Fall



Valley Stewardship Network encourages, promotes and helps create 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 in the watershed.

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