



Kickapoo Visions

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

Invasive Species

Workshop on May 20th

By Liz Quebe

The snow is melting, the sun is shining higher and brighter, the birds are back and singing early in the morning. It's finally spring and our thoughts turn to—invasive plant species! Yep, spring is the best time to traipse around our land, identify the bad guys, and get them before they get us.

Just what are invasive plants? The Invasive Plant Association of Wisconsin (IPAW) calls them “plants out of place.” They may have been planted by our pioneer ancestors as herbs or ornamentals or by local agencies looking for fast-growing species that could stop erosion. But these non-indigenous species have become more aggressive than anyone could have ever imagined, and are pushing out the native plants and wildflowers we treasure. So it's up to us to give our natives a fighting chance.

First we have to know what we're looking for, and then we have to know what to do when we find a bad patch. To help everyone interested (and everyone should be interested) VSN is holding a land walk under the guidance of Joey Esterline, a local expert on invasives. Esterline is a member of the Monroe County Invasive Species Group, a recommended IPAW speaker and former Monroe County UW-Extension Horticulture Consultant. The property we will walk is that of David and Lynn Chakoian, and it's located in Crawford County southwest of Soldiers Grove. The property is perfect for our workshop, as it has three distinct types of vegetation—wetland, prairie, and woodland.

We will be looking for a number of invasive species that are fast appearing in

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Providing Neutral Ground

Facilitating discussion; Looking for solutions

By Jeremy Lopez

Most people know how to tend a garden or even a farm, but how does an organization tend a watershed, one that includes 25,000 neighbors in a 700 square-mile area? In the garden or on the farm an individual, a family or sometimes business partners work together to make decisions. In tending the watershed, we see the need for a similar process. Businesses need to be in contact with landowners and residents, farmers need to be in contact with recreationists and hunters, community leaders need to facilitate these discussions so that voices are heard, reasoning understood and passions presented.

There are many real issues that need to be talked about here in the Kickapoo Valley. Issues ranging from last summer's air quality alerts, the high levels of bacteria found in our local streams, the decline of our family farm culture and economy, increasing population, the need for living wage jobs, and the threat of invasive species to native vegetation—to name a few.

The Valley Stewardship Network (VSN) is a grassroots organization that began in the mid-nineties with a group of engaged citizens getting together to talk about good stewardship practices in the Kickapoo Valley. The organization was helped along with guidance from Community Conservation of Gays Mills along with initial water quality monitoring and organizational support from Trout Unlimited of Wisconsin. These early benefactors understood the need for a strong independent organization for all the people who live, work, play in and respect the Kickapoo Watershed. This informal group offi-

cially incorporated as an independent not-for-profit organization in the year 2000 with the mission of stewarding the Kickapoo Valley.

Even with our several years of history, the Valley Stewardship Network still encounters folks who get us confused with other area organizations. To provide some clarity, the Kickapoo Reserve Management Board is appointed by the governor and focuses on the Kickapoo Valley Reserve; the Mississippi Valley Conservancy serves the watershed with land conservation easements; and Community Conservation works around the globe to create grassroots organization such as VSN. These are all wonderful local organizations with whom we occasionally collaborate.

The Valley Stewardship Network has always focused on the mission of providing a communication network for individuals and businesses. From this network came the request to concentrate on three areas of focus: Stewardship and Education, Water Monitoring, and Comprehensive Planning. Perhaps the most important role of VSN continues to be our work as a communications network, serving as common ground for information gathering and discussion of ideas.

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Water Quality Monitoring Corner

The Kickapoo Citizen Water Monitors (KCWM) have many opportunities this spring and summer to learn more about the waters running through our valley while enjoying a beautiful day along their favorite stream.



This summer we will continue with our third year of bacteria monitoring in the Middle and Upper Kickapoo Watershed. This project has been very useful in determining the levels of bacteria from runoff. We would like to thank everyone who has participated in previous years and we are looking for new volunteers to make this year another success. Bacteria monitoring takes about two hours and we ask for a commitment of one training session and monitoring one or two times per month.

The KCWM have been selected by the DNR to participate in a pilot project to collect data using DNR protocols and equipment. Seven monitors are being trained during this first year. The data will be used for management level decisions at the DNR. If the project is successful, the DNR will be able to make more informed decisions, using better data from more sources without a large increase in their budget. We are excited to be working more closely with DNR scientists and decision makers.



An advanced macroinvertebrate identification workshop will be offered April 8th at the West Fork Sports Club from 10 AM - Noon. Using microscopes we will learn how to determine more precisely what those little aquatic bugs tell us about the health of our streams. Call us at 637-3615 for details.

If you have a favorite stream, consider becoming a citizen monitor, equipment and training is provided. It's a great way to get

to know more about your water!

Threats to Water Quality

This spring, as the manure continues to roll into our clear, spring-fed streams, the Valley Stewardship Network is working to help those developing alternatives to spreading manure on frozen ground. Our network of citizen water monitors continue to record what is happening in our waters as well as report runoff incidents to the proper authorities.

There are large amounts of sawdust and other solid wood waste that continue to contribute pollution to our area streams. The burning of these piles causes additional pollution to run into our streams as well as pollute our air. VSN is actively working with Gail Frie of the Vernon County Solid Waste and Recycling and others to apply for grant money to clean up this wood waste.



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VSN works to promote stewardship and education by sharing publicity about events put on by others as well as organizing our own events such as our river cleanups (May 6 this year) and field days. VSN works with other organizations to help build and distribute birdhouses, provide convenient battery recycling opportunities, teach about water quality issues and awareness at local schools, and work on air quality issues in the area.

Our volunteer water monitors, working closely with local and state organizations, do a great job of gathering scientific data about water quality. The quality of our waters is a strong indicator of the health of our ecosystems.

The Kickapoo Conversations project and speakers like Mary Rehwald talking about The Natural Step approach to sustainability are examples of our support of comprehensive planning. We try to help and encourage communities to address the many issues and opportunities related to being ready for the future. A lot of tension can develop around issues like planning and land use regulations. It seems to boil down to a divergence of thought—common good versus personal impacts,

long-range versus short-term. Sadly, discussions are made more complicated by imagined threats and the spreading of erroneous information. Tribute should be paid to those individuals who continue to work at preparing their communities for success by envisioning future changes and planning for the best possible outcomes. No one ever said this work was easy.

The VSN office houses a good number of useful maps and publications that folks can borrow, and some they can keep, to help them in this work. The next public event to foster community conversation hasn't been finalized yet. Let us know what ideas you may have for good discussion topics and we'll try to work with them.

This area will be seeing a continued influx of population over the next 15 years and beyond. VSN wants to be involved in the development of positive strategies for that increased population to live lightly on the land and contribute in meaningful ways to strong communities. Recognizing the benefits and challenges of increased development requires that we remain aware and involved. We at VSN are prepared to do just that, offering neutral ground to encourage all people to talk about the issues that affect the Kickapoo Valley. Please join us in the nurturing of the VSN communication network.

Invasives *Continued from page 1*

the watershed. Garlic mustard is a major concern, as it is taking over our woodlands at an alarming rate; its first victims are our spring ephemerals, such as trillium, bloodroot, Jacob's ladder, and wild geranium. May is the perfect time to look for it and start the eradication process. We will also look for other woodland invasives such as honeysuckle, buckthorn, Japanese barberry, and multiflora rose; prairie invaders like Canada thistle, wild parsnip, dame's rocket, spotted knapweed, burdock and Queen Anne's lace; and wetland menaces like reed canary grass and purple loosestrife.

Please join us on Saturday, May 20, from 10:00 AM to 2:00 PM at 51165 Johnston Road near Soldiers Grove, WI.

Northern Monkshood (Aconitum noveboracense)

Photo courtesy of:
Reflective Images
Gary D. Tonhouse
Ankeny, IA
(515) 964-7815



Forestry for Birds

Field Day - April 29th

The Driftless Area, our home, has some of the finest migratory bird forest habitat in Wisconsin. Come and learn about interior forest bird habitat and how to manage forests for neo-tropical birds. This day-long event in Crawford County on Saturday April 29th includes a group of ornithologists and foresters speaking and answering questions. We will tour a forest that has breeding species dependent on mature habitat. This opportunity is sponsored by the Driftless Area Initiative, Kickapoo Woods Coop, Wisconsin Woodland Owners Association, the Department of Natural Resources, and the Audubon Society. With an eye towards preserving this wonderful forest resource that we share, we will also discuss conservation easements which can protect land from being subdivided forever.

For more information and to sign up, contact David Wilson at (608) 723-6377, ext. 135 or david.wilson@rcdnet.net. You can also contact VSN for information. An early morning bird walk will be offered to those who would like to come at 8 AM. Please indicate that you will be attending this bird walk when you register.

River Cleanup

May 6th - Help Wanted!

Valley Stewardship Network (VSN) is looking for volunteers to help cleanup the Kickapoo River on Saturday May 6th. This year's cleanup will start where last year's cleanup left off near Trout Creek Road and Highway 61 north of Soldiers Grove. We will gather at 9 AM and clean until early afternoon. Crews will remove litter and debris from the banks and river channel; there will be no tree cutting. If people are interested, a road crew will be organized to clean River Road. At 2 PM we will gather together for good food, fellowship and live music. Register by April 21st to receive a FREE VSN River Cleanup T-Shirt. Call or email VSN at 637-3615 or vsn@frontiernet.net to register or for more information.



Calendar of Events

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

April 8: Advanced Macroinvertebrate Identification Workshop. From 10AM - Noon at the West Fork Sports Club.

April 22: Chainsaw Safety Workshop Presented by the Kickapoo Woods Coop and the Reserve. Call 625-2515 to register.

April 29: Forestry for Birds
See article on this page.

April 29: KVR / Vernon Co. Cleanup
The annual Kickapoo Valley Reserve & Vernon County Park Cleanup. Call 625-2960 to register or for more information.

Birding Your Way Through the Month of May. Saturdays in May offer guided birding opportunities at the Kickapoo Valley Reserve. Call 625-2960 for details.

May 6: Kickapoo River Cleanup
See article on this page.

May 20: Invasive Species Workshop
See article on the front page.

June 25-28: International Conference on Rivers and Civilization. Hosted by UW-LaCrosse, this multidisciplinary conference targets an audience from the sciences, arts, humanities, groups who manage and use river resources, and curious individuals. Selected afternoon and evening sessions will be open to the public at no charge. Keynote speaker is Pulitzer Prize winner Jared Diamond. Visit www.rivers2006.org.

July 29 & 30: Kickapoo Country Fair
Join VSN in La Farge to celebrate community and sustainability at this benefit for the Kickapoo Valley Reserve. Fair features educational programs, farm tours, artisans, music, food and more. Contact Organic Valley at 625-2666 for more info or go to www.organicvalley.coop/kickapoo/

July 22: Public Astronomy Viewing
Enjoy our dark skies at Wildcat Mountain State Park with the Northwest Astronomy Club. Slide show at sundown followed by star gazing. Call (608) 337-4775 for details.

Oct. 7: KVR Dam Challenge Triathlon
Challenge yourself on the rugged hills of the Reserve & support education programs.

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:

Dahl Properties, Vernon County Solid Waste / Recycling, Kickapoo Orchards, Kickapoo Valley Reserve, Community Conservation, Viroqua Food Coop, WWTC, Crooked River Resort, Paragon Associates & Organic Valley.

Gail Frie, Diana Toledo, Maggie Jones & David Linton, Lynn & David Chakoian, Glenn & Barbara Lepley, David & Diane Banner, Dan Flaherty, Mike & Cathy Smith, Stephen Born, Larry & Diana Forkash, David F. Busch, John D. & Andrea F. Kenny, Dave & Rachel Toeppen, Harriet Behar & Aaron Brin, Jamie & Dan Johnson, Robert Horwich, Ken & Michelle Workowski, Jane Keeley & Kevin Dohse, Gary & Darlene Evans, Larry & Diana Forkash, Vince & Dawn Hundt, Gordon & Olga Browning, Jeremy Lopez, William Hanke, Richard Jawson, Brad & Carolyn

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www.kickapoovsn.org

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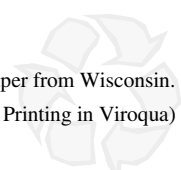
Make checks payable to: VSN

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Thank You

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VSN Welcomes Kadie Brueggen

Kadie Brueggen joined the Valley Stewardship Network Board of Directors in February of 2006. Brueggen was born and raised in Chaseburg, attended Westby High School before attending Edgewood College in Madison where she majored in Political Science with an emphasis on Environmental Policy. She was one of the first students to receive a minor in Environmental Studies. While attending Edgewood, Brueggen spent three weeks in Belize with Professor Jon Lyon touring Community Based sanctuaries. Brueggen states, "It was there that I saw the power of community conservation in action."

After school, she served as an intern at the State Capitol for Representative Suzanne Jeskewitz as



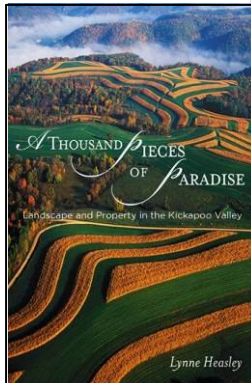
well as working for Wisconsin's Environmental Decade (now Clean Wisconsin). She researched campaign contributions, worked on action alert mailings to constituents and other campaigns.

Brueggen currently works in human resources at Couleecap in Westby. Her career, marriage and 20 month-old daughter have kept her busy. Brueggen states, "I have not been as involved as I have been in the past. I look forward to getting involved with VSN."

A Thousand Pieces of Paradise by

Lynne Heasley.

This new book provides an ecological and cultural history of property in the Kickapoo Valley. Available at the Kickapoo Valley Reserve and area bookstores.



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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- Gary Thompson, Chair, 637-3650
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