



Kickapoo Visions

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

Watershed Wonderings

By Jeremy Lopez

I have been projects coordinator at VSN for a little over two years now and I still ask myself the question; Is the watershed improving or degrading? This very basic question is difficult to answer. Part of the answer depends on the time frame -- the last five years, the last 30 years, the last 100 years? The 100-year question is the easiest due to the severe damage caused on hillsides that were once deforested and overgrazed and farmed without contour strips. These practices led to about four feet of topsoil washing down into the valley. I recently participated in an informative soils workshop where we took a soil sample from the Kickapoo River bottom that clearly showed those four feet of topsoil resting on top of an easily distinguishable layer of original topsoil. So the question remains regarding the improvement in more recent times.

What are the current trends?

One measurement to consider is the amount of soil currently being carried by the Kickapoo River today. Is the river clearing away silt from the riverbed or is it depositing more silt and soil? Are the hillsides being eroded or are they stable and maybe even building soil? When I walk the watershed, I see many well managed feeder streams, recutting their rocky streambeds. Overall erosion rates in the Kickapoo Valley are 5% of what they were in 1930. The DNR states that about 250 of the 1,250 miles of streams in the watershed have naturally reproducing trout populations, up from 170 in 1980. I see data stating that the streams and even the main stem of the Kickapoo on average are colder than 30 years ago - a good sign that more water is flowing from earthen springs and not washing in over land. Another obvious recent improvement is the lack of devastating flooding, due to increased vegetative buffers along the streams, less soil compaction on the hillsides and more awareness and understanding by landowners.

At the same time bacteria counts from VSN's monitoring clearly show that the same health issue detected ten years ago by Vernon Co. LWCD sampling still exists. VSN advises that you don't walk in waters muddied by storm runoff and stay out of floodwaters. The complete fish kill at Jersey Valley Lake begs the question, is this a trend or a one-time incident? Is there more manure being spread on frozen ground than in the past? On the bright side, the West Fork impressively maintained its oxygen levels and high water quality even with the presence of a dead lake, Jersey Valley, as a part of its source.

Bacteria contamination is not the only problem. There are reports confirmed by state laboratories of diesel

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Breathe!

Open burning and air quality in the Kickapoo

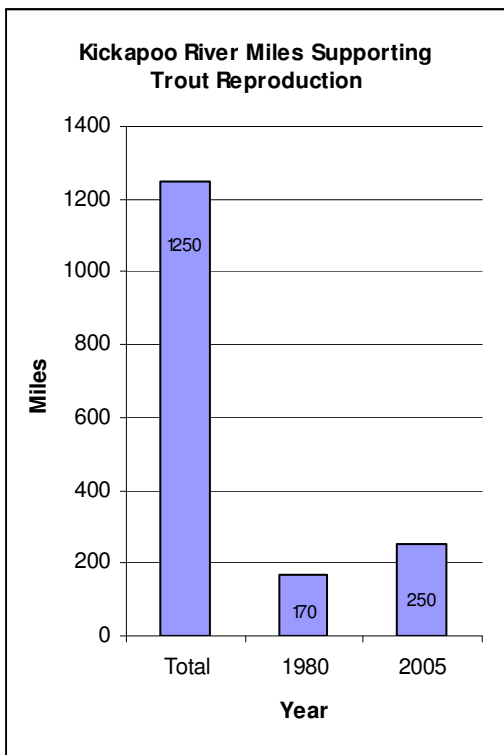
By Rosanne Boyett

At this time of the year many people truly enjoy the scent of wood smoke drifting through the cool, crisp air. There is a sense of comfort provided from watching a fire in the fireplace or adding another log to the wood-burning stove to warm the home on a chilly fall evening.

Nothing in life is totally good or totally bad, including the smell of smoke. Air quality in the watershed has become a topic of concern for many. Air pollution is viewed in two ways: directly affecting people (such as living next door to a factory or next to someone who is open burning) and indirectly (such as airborne emissions that add to the level of particulate matter in the ground-level atmosphere).

Under present law, open burning of wet rubbish, garbage, oily substances, asphalt, recyclable cardboard, plastic, rubber, painted or treated wood, recyclable paper, industrial waste wood products are all prohibited. **Open burning is the top source of dioxin emissions and the number one source of citizen complaints to the Department of Natural Resources.** The number one cause of wildfires in Wisconsin is from open burning, according to the DNR Forestry Division.

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Greg Brown at the Temple Theatre Nov. 19th details on page 2



Water Quality Monitoring Corner

By Jeremy Lopez

It has been a busy summer for the Kickapoo Citizen Water Monitors with 26 citizens actively monitoring 19 streams while also expanding our Upper and Middle Kickapoo bacteria monitoring project. **A big thank you to all the volunteers.**

As winter settles in, VSN will compile the 2005 data into summary reports. Initial results from the bacteria monitoring project show average E. coli counts were half to a third lower than 2004. We are still analyzing the data but we suspect the lower levels are due to fewer heavy rains in 2005. **The average results are still five times the EPA recommended levels for swimming beaches.** The average bacteria level is influenced by the dramatic increases in bacteria levels that occur after heavy rains, demonstrating that storm water runoff remains a health concern in the watershed.

The Vernon Co. LWCD has determined that it can refill **Jersey Valley Lake** in the summer of 2007 and open it for recreation, if they receive their requested funding from the federal government and the county. The determination was made based on the progress made this summer by weeds, which self seeded themselves on the bare nutrient rich lake bed and absorbed much of the nutrient load deposited by the manure spill.

The DNR reported 32 **manure runoff incidents** statewide in the previous year with 16 resulting in well contamination or fish kills. In response, two major efforts were worked on at the state level this summer to address waters polluted by runoff. In the spring of 2005, the governor appointed a task force to address manure management issues. Represented on the task force were farmer associations, environmental organizations, agency personnel from DATCP and DNR and other stakeholders. Findings from the task force are to be reported to

the Natural Resources and DATCP Boards at a joint meeting in February of 2006.

The DNR also recently completed the arduous process of revising the state **Shoreland Zoning Regulations** (NR 115), these rules govern development of waterfront property along rivers, flowages and lakes. The outdated rules, first approved in 1968, were revised by a DNR advisory committee made up of stakeholders including the River Alliance of Wisconsin, Wisconsin Builders Association and many others. The proposed rule changes had many compromises but overall were a significant improvement over current regulations. The public comment period ended this fall and showed that the rules may be too complex to implement. The DNR was to incorporate the public comments and pass on the rule changes to the Natural Resource Board this fall for approval before being sent to the state legislature to be debated and finalized. Unfortunately the DNR has been unable to recommend rule changes at the time of this writing.

New Board Members

By Kathy Neidert

Two Crawford County residents recently joined the VSN Board of Directors. They are **Maggie Jones** and **Jamie Johnson** both of rural Gays Mills.

Maggie has lived in Crawford County since 1976. She and her husband David Linton are woodland owners and woodworkers. They also make decorative tiles. Interested in raptors most of her life, she was a wildlife rehabilitator for 10 years and has a strong interest in forest birds, especially neo-tropical migrants. She is active in fighting the most aggressive invasive forest exotic weeds, like garlic mustard, and believes that the only way to preserve our forests for the long term is for everyone to become educated about threats like invasive plants and to learn the

best management programs for forest and forest dwellers' health.

She is also a member and supporter of Community Conservation, Inc., Mississippi Valley Conser-

vancy, The Prairie Enthusiasts, The Wisconsin Society for Ornithology, and many other organizations. This is Maggie's second time on the VSN Board and we are delighted to have her with us again.

Jamie Johnson moved to Wisconsin in 2003 from Colorado. She is the Marketing Executive Assistant at Organic Valley Family of Farms. At Organic Valley, she manages their Cooperative Giving and Partnership Programs. She believes very strongly in community involvement and part of her work centers on community and organizational cultural development. Throughout her life and work, Jamie has an emphasis on environmental issues, especially agriculture and water quality. She has spent six years in small business development, as well as being involved in the natural home building movement. She is currently co-owner of Midwest Earth Builders with her husband, Dan. They are dedicated to living a more sustainable lifestyle and own a small organic farm in the Kickapoo River Watershed near Gays Mills.



Maggie with 2 of her favorite canines

Greg Brown at Temple Theatre Nov. 19th – Really

Singer / poet Greg Brown is coming to the Temple Theatre in Viroqua, Wis. The show, arranged by area fans and VSN begins at 8 p.m. Brown's daughter, Pieta Brown, and Bo Ramsey will open the show, followed by Greg Brown performing with Ramsey and bass player Rick Sacatto. They will be fresh from a gig the night before in Chicago, and we surmise, glad to be back to the country. There are only 570 seats, don't miss out by waiting to get your tickets.

Brown was raised mostly in Iowa on music and storytelling. His mother played electric guitar, his grandfather played banjo, his grandmother was a poet and his father was a Pentecostal preacher. This is a special opportunity for both long-time fans and those who just want to hear from a guy who can write a line like, "How are things goin' in the small dark movie of your life?"

Tickets are available online at www.kickapooovsn.org or by calling VSN at 637-3615, \$22 in advance and \$25 day of.

Welcome to Jamie and Maggie!

Vernon Co. Planning Group Re-Convenes

By Kathy Fairchild

Bill Burke, planner, now with Foth & Van Dyke and Tom Kratt, engineer, of Mead & Hunt led a gathering October 12th of the Central Vernon County Comprehensive Planning Group. The group activities had been in limbo while Bill's current and former employers worked out the details of completing the Department of Administration grant requirements but are now back on schedule according to Burke. The completion date remains June 30, 2006.

Nearly every unit of government was represented. First drafts reflecting planning group changes sent to Burke will be

out to the communities during November. The schedule calls for a more finalized or "recommended" draft to be ready for preliminary state review of format and general content sometime between February and April. Based on that review and changes communities wish to make, the final plan drafts for each community should be ready to review with the elected officials by April 2006. It was noted that planning activities do not require Village Powers, while adoption of the plan would.

Those present acknowledged that public education about both the advisory and open-to-revision nature of a comprehensive plan, along with the actual content of each draft, will need to be worked at through press releases, mailings, community gatherings, etc.

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fuel and other toxins leaching into waters of the Kickapoo from adjacent industries. Pumping of large amounts of water for industrial use and irrigation causes stream levels to be lowered. A few streams have periodically dried up this summer. This phenomenon has no precedent and the DNR is investigating.

The DNR maintains fish consumption advisories for the waters of the Kickapoo due to the presence of mercury, a toxin known to cause birth defects along with hearing, memory and vision loss. Researchers attribute most of the mercury deposition in water to atmospheric sources such as coal-fired electrical generating facilities, which are responsible for 40% of our state's mercury emissions. Support for clean energy, in the upcoming state energy bill, will be crucial to the reduction of mercury in our water. Learn more on the DNR website and sign a clean energy petition at www.wispirg.org.

When we look at the waters of the Kickapoo to determine if they are improving or being degraded, murky answers seem to surface. Water quality is a strong indicator of how we live on the land. As an organization VSN continues to stay alert for opportunities to improve water quality.

What Can We Do?

Get involved! Talk to our neighbors, our colleagues, our friends and family about issues affecting the health of the Kickapoo Watershed. There are a host of fun and helpful educational activities on topics of interest to you offered by VSN, Kickapoo Valley Reserve (KVR), Kickapoo Woods Coop, Mississippi Valley Conservancy, DNR, Prairie Enthusiasts, etc. Join with others to help reduce the invasive species devouring our native plant communities. Volunteer at the Kickapoo Cleanup hosted by VSN or the Vernon County Parks and Reserve Cleanup hosted by the KVR, both held in the spring. Join the Kickapoo Citizen Water Monitors and help keep an eye on your favorite stream while recording valuable baseline data. Support our local businesses because they want to thrive in a healthy watershed. If you see water being degraded, please report it to the proper authorities or call VSN.

The members of VSN are a diverse network of people who live, work and play in the Kickapoo Valley and share an enthusiasm for working together to keep our watershed healthy. If you have questions and/or an interest in helping, please give us a call. Learn more about VSN and opportunities for you at www.kickapoovsn.org or call 637-3615.

Get out and enjoy your streams!

Calendar of Events

Updates, additional information and other events are listed at www.kickapoovsn.org

Nov 16: Forestry in Focus

Learn to manage trees for all aspects of what people love from the forest. 6:30 at the Kickapoo Valley Reserve. Call 625-2960 for more info.

Nov. 19: Greg Brown Concert

See article on page 2.

Dec. 3: Celebrating Community Ties

Last of the Driftless Dialogue Series sponsored by the Kickapoo Valley Reserve. Celebrate with friends, food, and music! Call 625-2960 for more info.

Jan. 7: Winter Festival at the Kickapoo Valley Reserve.

Call the Reserve for more info 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.



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:

The Drift, Dahl Building, Community Conservation, Viroqua Food Coop, WWTC, Crooked River Resort, Mickelson Market, Paragon Associates, Solar Town Pharmacy, Dregne's Insurance, Kettle Creek String Band, Kickapoo Valley Medical Clinic / Hirsh Clinic, Kickapoo Valley Association, Village Market, Organic Valley, Crawford County Emergency Government, Nelson's Agri-Center, Vernon County Landfill and Gail Frie, Turkey Ridge.

Paul Krahn, Bryan J. Stanley, Jerry and Liz Quebe, Doreen O'Donnell, Janet Wissmann, Richard A & Marge R Peters, Bill Putze, Marcia Halligan, Richard Busch, Daniel Stohr, Patricia Roth & Jay Roth-Reynolds, Kathy Fairchild, Joseph Putsch, Paul and Bernadette Hayes, Edie Ehlert and Glenn Donovan, Randy Kahn and Vicky Eiben, Rebecca Wainscott and Maggie Jones.



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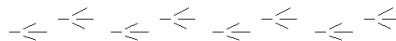
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Over the years, the DNR has maintained a number of air quality monitoring stations around the state. The location and types of data collected have changed in response to new rules and/or budget constraints. Wildcat State Park, Ontario, is the site of one of these monitoring stations. Currently it records ozone levels at the park. This month the DNR is placing **air quality monitoring equipment in La Crosse** to track levels of particulates that are less than 2.5 microns in size since this type of emission acts as a gas and is readily spread through wind movement. Fine particulates (2.5 microns, etc.) come primarily from auto exhausts and open burning of materials. In other words, we all breathe in particulate matter whether we live next to a busy highway, a factory or a neighbor who is illegally burning prohibited materials. Distance does not guarantee safety.

An advisory group (with representatives from Wisconsin Towns Association, Wisconsin Counties Association, Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation, Sierra Club Midwest Offices, Wisconsin

Institute of Scrap Recycling Industries, American Lung Association of Wisconsin and Vernon County waste management program) recommended recently that Wisconsin residents who burn trash and debris outdoors **need to do a better job of complying with state air quality rules in order to protect public health.** It stated the need for comprehensive strategies to reduce illegal open burning, clarify legal open burning options and encourage alternatives, such as composting.

We all live and work in the watershed. We all breathe the same air. We all hope for a better future for young and old alike. Please contact your Vernon County supervisor and express your concern. Call 637-5380 to find your supervisor.



Pleasant Ridge Waldorf School's Land Raffle. Win a five-acre ridge top parcel with amazing views of Carter Mountain near lovely, rural Viroqua.

Tickets \$50, proceeds benefit PRWS, drawing is on Dec. 2, 2005. For more information, call 637-7828 or visit: www.pleasantridgewaldorf.org.

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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