

Kickapoo Visions

~ Promoting Stewardship, Connecting Communities since 2000 ~

www.kickapooovsn.org

Autumn 2009 Volume IX, Issue II

Clouds of Memory

By Founder & Board Member Kathy Fairchild



River Clean-Up

In the mid 90's, I was working part-time with Community Conservation in Gays Mills. The Community Conservation approach is to identify an indicator species for international projects, a canary in the coal mine that can be used to rally communities and provide focus for environmental improvement projects. The Kickapoo Watershed didn't have any howler monkeys or golden langurs but we certainly had cold water trout streams. So Trout Unlimited's Home Rivers Initiative project came to the Kickapoo watershed in 1996 and partnered with Community Conservation to create a water monitoring project in the watershed's area schools.

As the Trout Unlimited project drew to a close, a citizen group, adopting the name Valley Stewardship Network, was created to focus on regional watershed issues, defining four areas of operation: Water Monitoring, Comprehensive Planning Support, Biological Assessments with GIS Mapping, and Stewardship Education. It was apparent early on that the 744 square miles of Kickapoo watershed was a huge project area and we would do the best we could with limited resources to connect with all of it. In those early years, "Smart Growth" comprehensive planning legislation was passed and the VSN initiated the "Kickapoo Conversations" community visioning project in 2003, bringing together 250 people to work enthusiastically on defining the future of our region. The ideas spawned from those gatherings included the genesis of the Driftless Area Art Festival and community radio station WDRT, which hits the airwaves next summer.



Kickapoo Conversations



Invasive Species Education

Over the years we have hosted "Celebration of the Kickapoo" events, river clean-ups, education on invasive species, and a fabulous night with Greg Brown in 2005. Our talented staff and tireless volunteers have made possible the publication of the "Voices of the Valley" poetry project and one of our most popular pieces of literature, "Owning Rural Lands", a comprehensive guide to regional resources for landowners. In April, 2007 the prospect of large confined animal feeding operations (CAFOs), a clear threat to the health of our fragile watershed, again found us at the front lines, providing community forums for information awareness, discussion and appropriate action to directly address the issue. This helped spawn a renewed sense of shared communal responsibility for an environment we all care deeply about, and helped create a broad-based alliance of citizens prepared to work to protect our natural resources.

The ambitious four-fold project focus for VSN from the year 2000 has been updated to better represent what is currently needed and what VSN is uniquely capable of doing: Water Monitoring (now a multi-level program that also includes private well testing services); the Food and Farm Initiative that provides broad-based and far reaching benefits in our mission to strengthen communities; and Stewardship, which remains as the masthead for our work in helping the community educate itself, not only in responding to such issues as the Coal Ash Dump and CAFOs, but also in offering professional presentations on The Natural Step (a method of building an economically and ecologically sustainable society), Migratory Bird Habitat, Karst Geology and other environmental topics.

VSN has evolved. We now have more of an emphasis on NETWORK while still working with the issues of responsible stewardship. And we profoundly recognize that we are all in this together and it is up to each of us to do what we can do to make the future of our collective lives in the Driftless region the best that it can be.



Greg Brown in 2005

Thanks for being a part of this exciting network!



VSN Annual Meeting, 2009

Major Rivers and Streams
Communities
County Boundaries





Food for Thought

By Jessica Luhnig

Two years ago a handful of VSN members set out to create a grass-roots initiative aimed at improving our local food system. Armed with no budget and no certainty for success, this group was relentless in their mission to research, conspire and day-dream their way to the creation of what is now known as the Food & Farm Initiative.



Sara Martinez, Matt Urch and Sam Urch at Viroqua Farmer's Market

What began as a response to health and environmental threats generated by impending industrial agriculture (CAFOs) has evolved into a multi-faceted sustainable agriculture and food system program that has received local, regional and national recognition. From a Community Food Assessment to a Harvest Dinner, Farm to School to the Kickapoo Harvest: Gleaning for Healthy Communities – the Food & Farm Initiative (FFI) has had a busy couple of years.

The good work of the FFI is largely attributed to a passionate and dedicated group of volunteers who work endless volunteer hours as members of the FFI Steering Committee. Monthly meetings, local agriculture and food-related events and community projects keep these folks on their toes. The Initiative would be nowhere without their tireless dedication!

In the past couple of weeks FFI has received a new burst of energy as Nicole Penick has taken over as FFI Coordinator. Nicole has served as a volunteer on the FFI Steering Committee for several months and brings with her a passion for sustainable food system development and a deep understanding of community organizing. She will be working in the VSN office Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 11-4pm if you want to stop by and say hello. In addition, Sara Martinez, one of FFI's original founders and an active member of the FFI Steering Committee has recently joined the VSN Board of Directors. Sara is a welcome addition to the VSN Board and a pivotal link between the Board, FFI Staff and the FFI Steering Committee. Thank you Sara for your continued commitment to VSN and FFI!



FFI Volunteer Gleaners at Keewaydin Farm



FFI Volunteer Gleaners at Small Family Farm CSA

As Nicole is ushered into the VSN family along with new Office Manager Emily Rozeske, the time has come for me to hand over my staff responsibilities. This has been a personal decision, both difficult and welcomed at the same time. With this next step forward I am looking forward to many years of active volunteerism with VSN and FFI.

FFI's most recent project, Kickapoo Harvest: Gleaning for Healthy Communities, has been our most rewarding work yet. Over the last five months seven local farms invited FFI and a troop of community volunteers to harvest "unmarketable" veggies and

fruit from their farm fields. To our surprise the farmers were delighted to have us tramp through his/her fields carrying out basket after basket of near perfect squash, tomatoes, green beans, peppers, eggplants – you name it and we harvested it! In total we harvested over 2,000 pounds of food that was carefully washed and packed neatly into fresh food boxes by yet another troop of volunteers.

The recipients of all this wonderful bounty were elderly, limited-income residents of Parkview Manor in downtown Viroqua. With each fresh food box delivery a local chef provided a cooking demo on how to properly wash, store and prepare the fresh food items. The smiles, hugs and "thank you's" given out by the Parkview residents were enough to know that our first gleaning pilot project was a success.

We will now embark on a few months of strategic planning – more conspiring and day-dreaming about future projects to further connect the community around local food and agriculture. Stay tuned...we promise it will be good! Contact Nicole at vsnnicole@gmail.com for more information.

Reflections on a River

By Gary Thompson



Read's Creek

VSN's Board, staff, and members, recently gathered to reflect on and celebrate Ten Years of hard work and accomplishments in the Kickapoo region. As we fellowshiped over good wine, hors d'oeuvres, and cake, I couldn't help but reflect on the beginnings of the WQM Program and the '09 monitoring season. Many of you are aware that it has been a difficult season for me, as I've battled the debilitating effects of Lyme infection since mid-April. As I listened to the speakers share VSN's past and present accomplishments; I was reminded of the dedication of these individuals who took up the challenge of filling the void left by my absence. I'm grateful to be part of an organization that is committed to getting the work done that needs to be done, so that the community we all cherish continues to be preserved and protected for future generations.

In 1997, twelve volunteers gathered to learn how to collect water quality data, making a concerted effort to protect the Kickapoo Watershed. One year later, the Kickapoo Watershed Citizen Monitors, presently the Kickapoo Citizen Water Monitors (KCWM), began a monthly routine. This momentum lead to the development of a watershed-wide educational program with local school districts, bringing an important awareness of our local natural resources. Through funding provided by an Environmental Education Grant and the leadership of Laura Hewitt (Trout Unlimited), Community Conservation, and other area educators, our community became actively involved in becoming true stewards of their surroundings.



Jeremy Lopez with Laurel High School students

By 1999, the KCWM had collected enough data to publish the first Kickapoo River Watershed Report, a document that can be accessed at any of our local libraries. In 2000, the group adopted the UW



Ext. Water Action Volunteer (WAV) protocols for collecting water quality data and joined a state-wide movement for uniformity in the Citizen Monitor based effort.

Recently the KCWM has been involved in several collaborative projects including: the Kickapoo River Bacteria Monitoring Project, Monroe County BMP project, Roth CAFO (Crawford Co.) monitoring effort, and the Viroqua Karst Pilot Project. We are currently in the planning stages for establishing a monitoring plan above the soon to be restored, Jersey Valley lake.



Gary out in the field.

Since the beginning of my involvement with the KCWM in 2003, I've been encouraged by the continued commitment of VSN members volunteering their time and actively taking responsibility and caring for the abundant water resources that so many take for granted. As the WQM program continues to grow and adapt to ever changing challenges, we appreciate your continued support. For more information about the KCWM's, you can contact the VSN office or Gary at vsngary@gmail.com.

Expanding Our Team at VSN

New Staff

Emily Joy Rozeske - Office Manager



I graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 2003 with a B.S. in Zoology and Biological Aspects of Conservation, and a Certificate of Environmental Studies. My husband and I moved to Viroqua two years ago when our daughter Lily was just over a year old. We moved from Madison seeking to bring up our daughter with a strong sense of community and a connection to the land. Viroqua offers amazing opportunities to live and teach conservation practices and land preservation. In addition to VSN, I work at the Viroqua Chamber Main Street as the part-time administrative assistant and serve on the Board of the Kickapoo Valley Association. It is my hope to be able to help the greater community of the Kickapoo Valley collaborate to preserve the area's resources and continue to make this one of the best places to work, live and play.

Nicole Penick - FFI Coordinator



Nicole moved to Viroqua one year ago being drawn by the land, the people, and the strong sense of community. Nicole's early work in non profits began with her decision to join AmeriCorps when she was 19 through the Public Allies program. She completed her bachelors in Community Leadership and Development through Alverno College. Nicole's work on voter rights education, peace education and grass roots democracy has helped to shape her understanding of social justice and community development. This work led her to her master's program in Earth Literacy. Nicole has been a work-share member of a CSA farm and has managed a neighborhood farmer's market. Nicole has also interned with a biodynamic gardener. All of these experiences have helped educate and inspire her to put her talents to work in building a local and sustainable food system in Vernon County.

New Board Members

Paul Hayes



Having lived and worked in a large city for over 40 years before moving to the Kickapoo Valley, I have a special appreciation for the quality of life that this area provides. Now, after 10 years here, I am amazed each day by the beauty, tranquility and sense of community that we all enjoy. I also know that sustaining this quality of life requires constant vigilance. We have crystal clear streams, diverse woodlands and hill prairies interspersed with our family farms and towns. We need to monitor our water quality, guard against invasive species, sustain our farming heritage and manage our growth. As beautiful as this area is, it is also very fragile; let's work together so that our children and grandchildren can enjoy and value it as we do.

Sara Martinez



The Valley Stewardship Network is one of the bright stars of community life here. I joined the VSN in 2007, when it led a grassroots campaign to pass a moratorium on large-scale livestock operations in Vernon County. I love the organization's ability to effectively educate and engage people on vital natural resource issues. Helping to create the Food and Farm Initiative has been immensely rewarding, and I continue to enjoy serving on its steering committee. I recently joined the VSN Board to help the organization in its excellent promotion of positive local watershed-based land management.

Monica Orban



Two years ago, I moved to rural Westby, WI from southwest Michigan where I was a director of a conservation district for several years in a community much like Vernon County. Natural resource conservation, land use issues and sustainable agriculture have been common threads and passions in my public work and private life for over 20 years. Currently, I work for Organic Valley as an Events Analyst as well as steward a diverse 37-acre organic farm in Dell. When I purchased my farm in November 2006, I started reading local articles of the consistent efforts the Valley Stewardship Network was doing as a grassroots citizens group in areas from water quality to farmland initiatives. VSN won my attention and my heart. I am honored to be a new board member and look forward to raising awareness and support for our precious community and its award winning gem - VSN.

Kris Snowdeal



Born and raised in Michigan, Kris is a transplant to Viroqua having recently moved here with her husband, Eric and son, Odin. They recognized instantly that the Driftless Region is a rare, rare treasure. Kris was particularly struck by its natural, spiritual, and cultural beauty and the energy that comes from people making a difference and preserving what is valued. Kris brings to the Valley Stewardship Network Board an education in Liberal Arts, Political Science and Environmental Management - with an emphasis in Sustainability. Her experience and interests sit at the intersection of these areas and is inspired by strong sense of community, equality, and collaboration.



Valley Stewardship Network
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VSN News Has Gone Tree-Free!

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Please make checks payable to VSN or donate on our website at www.kickapooovsn.org.

All contributions are tax deductible.

Thank You!

Watershed Calendar of Events

DECEMBER 11 — Harvest Challenge Gala

Join us Friday evening, December 11th for the first annual Vernon Area Farm to School Harvest Challenge. Four local high school teams will be competing to see who can create the tastiest, healthiest and most locally sourced school lunch recipes. The competing high school teams will each offer a taste of their recipe creations and a judging panel of local food experts will determine a winner on the night of the event. In addition, the reception will include speakers and a silent auction fundraiser. The event is being sponsored by Viroqua Area School District, Valley Stewardship Network Food & Farm Initiative and Organic Valley. Please check the VSN website (www.kickapooovsn.org) for more details as they will be announced shortly.

VSN Board Meetings are on the third Tuesday of each month from 6:00-8:00pm. Everyone is welcome. Please call the office for meeting location (637-3615).

To stay current on all VSN events and news, please visit our website at www.kickapooovsn.org. We have a fresh new look and you have the wonderful option of donating online. We encourage you to take a tour of the website and let us know what you think!

Thank You Members and Donors

We very much want to thank those who have contributed since our last newsletter.

Memberships & Special Support:

Susan Gesslein, Sally Marshall, David & Patricia Fisher, Jerry & Liz Quebe, Viroqua Food Cooperative, Maura Otis & Barry Jensen, James & Ann Barnes, Gundersen Lutheran, Maggie Jones, Richard & Patricia Rubasch, Sherry Diaz, Bill & Barbara Motlong, Evan Jones & Joel Johnson, Paul & Bernadette Hayes, Lavern Pitman, Jessica Leinberger, Monica Orban, Mark Taylor, Bradley & Carolyn Steinmetz, Kathy Neidert, Margaret Parr, Edward & Barbara Martinez, Jennifer & Brian Ramsey, John & Brenda Hill, Sharon Meissner, Theodore & Catherine Parrish, Barry & Susan Paull, Patricia Dougherty, Warren Martin, Gertrude Martin, Kathy & Paul Fairchild, Vicky Eibin & Randy Kahn, Wayne & Gayle Johnson, Jack & Maggie Lee, Elizabeth McGeeveren, CROPP Cooperative, Vernon Electric Cooperative, Kris & Eric Snowdeal, Lars & Corina Bergan, David & Diane Banner, Thor & Joan Thorson, Margaret & Richard La Martina, Robert & Mary Jane Lake, Linda & William Kica, Colleen & Hubert Gilgenbach, Philip & Monique Hooker, Marcia Halli-

gan & Steven Adams, Elizabeth Lange, Janet Kruk & Mark Katz, Jeremy Lopez, Kathy Rohr-Ninmer, Driftless Speakers, Rosalind Woodward, Rebecca Comeau & Robert Goonin, Amy Arnold & Kelsey Sauber Olds, Kadie & Brandon Bruegen, Rob Horwich, Tamara Dean, and Kathleen Crittenden.

Thank You!

Interested in promoting VSN wherever you go? We are offering 100% organic cotton T-shirts with the new VSN logo. Haven't seen the new logo? Check out the top left corner of this page or our website at www.kickapooVSN.org! Shirts are \$20 and a great gift for everyone this holiday season. We would love to know that you are spreading awareness in Yellowstone National Park, the Eiffel Tower, or even in your own backyard! Contact our office at 637-3615 for more information.



Kickapoo Visions

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Promoting Stewardship, Connecting Communities in the Kickapoo Valley Region

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Gary Thompson, WQM Coordinator (vsngary@gmail.com)

New Staff Email