

Kickapoo Valley Reserve

FEES: Trail Pass: \$5 per day per person 16 years old and over
 *\$25 Annual Individual Pass
 *\$40 Annual Family Pass
 *Additional \$15 for Friends of KVR membership.

Parking: \$5 per vehicle per day at River Access lots 5 - 18.
 Annual passes cover parking and trail use only.

Camping: Vehicle Accessible Sites \$20/night,
 Non-vehicle Accessible sites \$15/night

Rules & Policies

To uphold the mission, rules have been established to protect and preserve the Kickapoo Valley Reserve:

Pack it in, Pack it out - take all trash and items with you. Clean up after yourself!

No Glass on the River - broken glass can cause serious injury.

Leave No Trace - use designated fire pits only; use dead-down wood or purchase from local vendors. Bury human waste at least 200 ft from a water source, use a WAG bag or get to a flush or porta toilet.

Archaeological Sites - are provided the utmost protection. Violations are subject to state, tribal and federal enforcement.

Pets & Animals - dogs must be on leash April 15 through July 31 to protect nesting birds and under voice control all other times, this includes in campsites. Stock should be tethered, penned or under handlers' control at all times while on the property. No loose animals are allowed. Dumping or abandoning of animals on the property is strictly prohibited.

Property Boundaries - be aware of the irregular border of the Reserve. It is your responsibility to know where you are and respect private property. No trespassing!

Motorized vehicles prohibited - including E-bikes. An application for mobility impaired permit is available upon request.

Trails - many are shared use allowing equestrian, bicycle and hiking use in the riding season. Designated use for each trail is posted on the map and at the trailhead.

- Riding Season May 1- November 15. Equestrian and bike trails are open weather permitting.
- Trails close during the riding season due to wet conditions. Check trail status prior to use.
- Old Hwy 131 Trail and Star Valley Trail remain open in wet conditions during the riding season unless posted closed.
- Hiking is allowed year-round.
- Winter trail information can be found on the website or at the Visitor Center.

Camping - is allowed in designated sites only. Book campsites online or at the Visitor Center. Note the 10-day, 10-person max per site. Groups over 10 people must apply for a special event permit.

Pass Required - for use of the property. Trail pass, parking pass and camping permits are available at the Visitor Center or online. WI State Park/Trail passes/permits do not apply to KVR property.

Public Hunting, Fishing and Trapping - are allowed on the property in designated areas only. WI DNR laws and licenses apply. Users should wear bright colors during hunting seasons. Hunters must know their target and beyond. Target practice, the use of drones and trail cameras are prohibited. Tree stands must be removed at the end of hunting each day.

A full list of Administrative Rules governing the Reserve and subsequent penalties are posted at the Visitor Center and on the website.

Trail & Outdoor Etiquette

Shared use trails require good trail etiquette. Hikers and bikers yield to equestrians. Each encounter should include a friendly hello and passing conversation. Make sure your mount is desensitized and steady enough for shared use trails.



Safety First

On the land - visitors are often unprepared to encounter the elevation changes and varied terrain of the Reserve. Use caution, don't overexert, stay hydrated and know your location. Share your expected route and length of time you will be out with someone. Use of official KVR maps is highly recommended. Cellphones, GPS units may not have service and crowdsourced digital apps/maps are not always accurate. Plan accordingly.

On the Kickapoo River - watch for changing weather conditions, the river is highly susceptible to flash flooding. Mobile weather alerts and real time gaging stations at La Farge and Ontario are useful resources to stay safe. Find those resources on the KVR website.

LEGEND

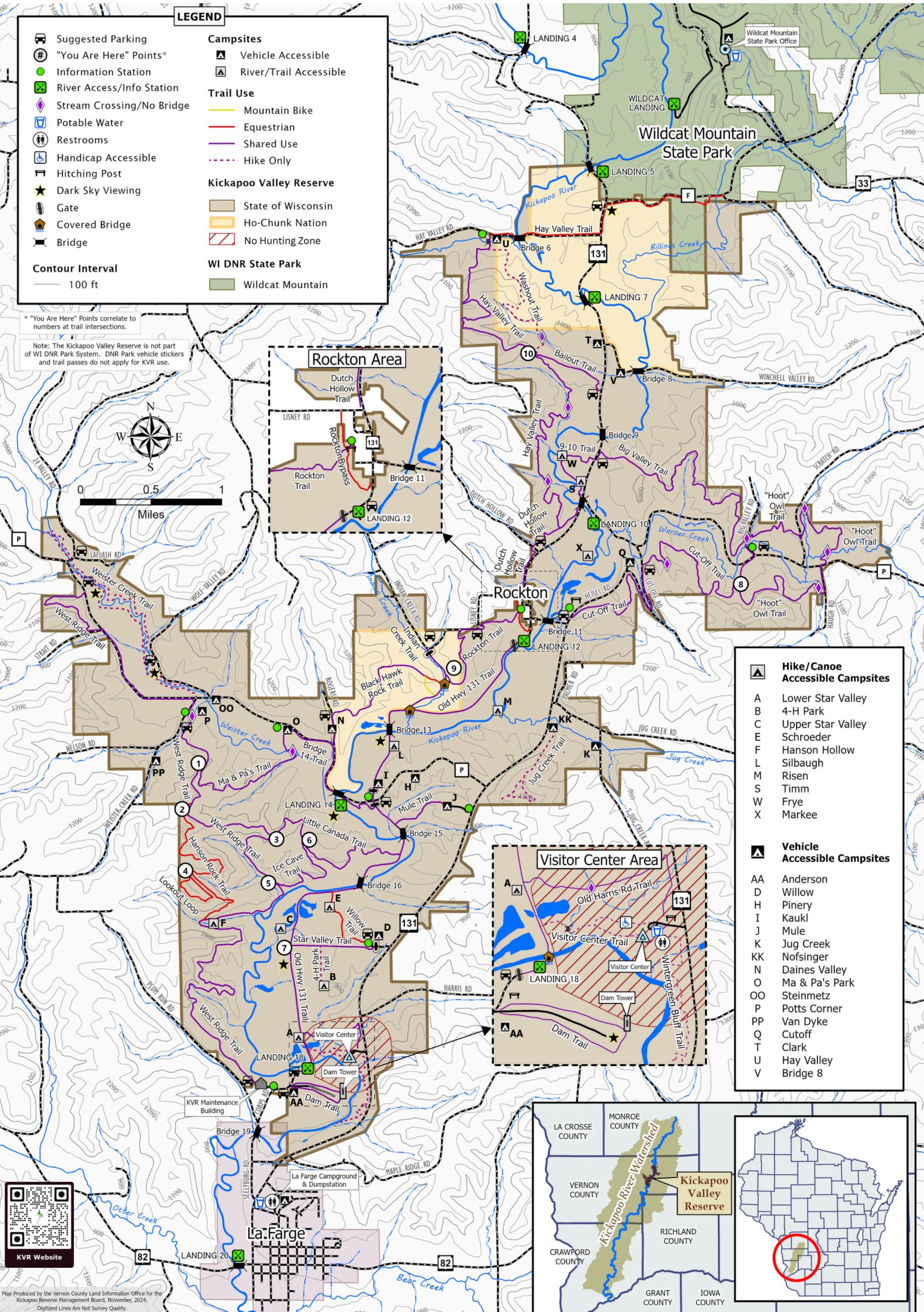
- Suggested Parking
 - "You Are Here" Points*
 - Information Station
 - River Access/Info Station
 - Stream Crossing/No Bridge
 - Potable Water
 - Restrooms
 - Handicap Accessible
 - Hitching Post
 - Dark Sky Viewing
 - Gate
 - Covered Bridge
 - Bridge
- Campsites**
- Vehicle Accessible
 - River/Trail Accessible
- Trail Use**
- Mountain Bike
 - Equestrian
 - Shared Use
 - Hike Only
- Kickapoo Valley Reserve**
- State of Wisconsin
 - Ho-Chunk Nation
 - No Hunting Zone
- WI DNR State Park**
- Wildcat Mountain
- Contour Interval: 100 ft

* "You Are Here" Points correlate to numbers at trail intersections.

Note: The Kickapoo Valley Reserve is not part of WI DNR Park System. DNR Park vehicle stickers and trail passes do not apply for KVR use.



0 0.5 1 Miles



- Hike/Canoe Accessible Campsites**
- A Lower Star Valley
 - B 4-H Park
 - C Upper Star Valley
 - E Schroeder
 - F Hanson Hollow
 - L Silbaugh
 - M Risen
 - S Timm
 - W Frye
 - X Markee
- Vehicle Accessible Campsites**
- AA Anderson
 - D Willow
 - H Pinery
 - I Kaukl
 - J Mule
 - K Jug Creek
 - KK Nofsinger
 - N Daines Valley
 - O Ma & Pa's Park
 - OO Steinmetz
 - P Potts Corner
 - PP Van Dyke
 - QQ Cutoff
 - T Clark
 - U Hay Valley
 - V Bridge 8



Map Produced by the Vernon County Land Information Office for the Kickapoo Reserve Management Board, November, 2024. Digitized Lines Are Not Survey Quality.

Mission

The land in the Kickapoo Valley Reserve shall be protected, preserved, and enhanced so that its unique environmental, scenic, and cultural features provide opportunities for the use and enjoyment of visitors to the Reserve. The Reserve will be promoted as a unique example of the Driftless Area Ecoregion and as a destination for low-impact tourism and education.



WELCOME TO THE Kickapoo Valley Reserve



Learn more...

Contact us:

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This publication is printed with soy-based ink on recycled paper, underscoring our commitment to the environment and to fostering stronger sustainability practices in Wisconsin.

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The Kickapoo Valley Reserve is open year-round for recreation, education and special events.

Located in the heart of the Driftless Region, the ridges and valleys carved by the Kickapoo River offer the spectacular scenery of an ancient landscape.

The State-sanctioned Kickapoo Reserve Management Board is responsible for managing the 8600-acre property on behalf of the State of Wisconsin and Ho-Chunk Nation. As a publicly protected property - subject to state, tribal and federal laws - visitors are asked to be aware of the rules and permit requirements covered in this visitor guide.



DRIFTLESS

During the last ice age, between 2 million and 10,000 years ago, glaciers covered much of Wisconsin. The glaciers deposited vast amounts of sediment called drift; however, glaciers never covered this part of the state, therefore it is known as the Driftless Region.



Cultural History

This magnificent public property exists today because of an abandoned flood control project. Initiated through Congress in the early 1960s, the original intent was to dam the Kickapoo River as a means of protecting the downstream communities from frequent, devastating floods. As the project came closer to reality the scope expanded with a promise to enhance tourism with a man-made lake.

The environmental movement of the early 1970s, an escalating project budget and academic analysis that showed the lake might not live up to the recreation expectations all led to the demise of the dam and lake project. Construction of the dam was halted in 1975. The property sat idle until 1995. Broken promises of flood control, lake-based tourism and economic prosperity had a substantial impact on the community and displaced residents.

In 2000, the US Army Corps of Engineers officially transferred ownership of the land to the State of Wisconsin and the Bureau of Indian Affairs in trust for the Ho-Chunk Nation to be managed by the Kickapoo Reserve Management Board. The Visitor Center, an 8,300 square foot nature center, opened in 2004 and has hosted thousands of guests from near and far.

For thousands of years, First Nations People lived here. While they left hundreds of archaeological sites - more than 450 have been identified through surveys - they changed the land little. The Upper Kickapoo Valley Prehistoric Archaeological District is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. These sites include rock shelters, burial mounds, petroglyphs and open-air camps and village sites.



A cultural and ecological gem

The Ho-Chunk were removed from this part of Wisconsin via the Treaty of 1837, which they were told allowed eight years until their removal from Wisconsin - and time to negotiate a better treaty, in reality, the treaty stated eight months. "Later the interpreter admitted that he was directed to deceive the Indians." (Nancy Lurie Anthropologist) Removal number one.

As European settlers occupied the valley, they removed trees, plowed the land and harnessed the Kickapoo River for milling. Their numbers multiplied, and their use of the land contributed to and was impacted by the river's periodic flooding. The proposal for a dam and lake sounded like a solution. Over 149 families sold or were forced to sell their homes and businesses for the dam and lake project. Removal number two.

In May of 2001, at a land transfer ceremony that officially created the Kickapoo Valley Reserve, it was noted that now the land has come full circle, as it is now preserved and protected for "all the people".

In June of 2025, celebrating 25 years of preserving and protecting the Kickapoo Valley Reserve, the Kickapoo Reserve Management Board holds a rededication ceremony that continues to honor the shared vision and partnership between the State of Wisconsin and Ho-Chunk Nation to ensure the Kickapoo Valley Reserve remains preserved and protected for generations to come.

What makes it special..



"As you walk the Reserve, you are part of the land and its spirit. Be humble in its presence and respect its power to change, provide and continue"

The Ho-Chunk Nation

Education

Learning at the Kickapoo Valley Reserve is for everyone! The Visitor Center offers an interactive exhibit honoring cultural and natural resources as well as featuring the importance of the KVR Community. The Reserve offers indoor classroom space and holds engaging programs for all ages. The most exciting learning happens outdoors! Explore this 8600-acre outdoor classroom!



Learners of all ages can enjoy programs year-round that provide immersive experiences into the natural world. Teachers can find tailored field trips to compliment your current natural world curriculum.

Natural Features

The property is recognized as a National Natural Landmark, a State Natural Area, a National Recreation Trail, an Important Bird Habitat Area, Dark Sky Preservation Area and one of Wisconsin's Wetland Gems. The combination of geologic features with abundant water resources results in magnificent sandstone cliffs, beneficial floodplain forests, and hardwood-covered bluffs towering over the ancient Kickapoo River.



What we protect...

Shady sandstone cliffs contain numerous seeps and harbor many rare plants that are restricted to cool, moist microclimates. These cliffs are important habitat for one of Wisconsin's largest populations of the federally threatened northern monkshood (*Aconitum noveboracense*) and state endangered Lapland azalea (*Rhododendron lapponicum*), which is found at only one other site in Wisconsin.



Other rare cliff plants include drooping sedge (*Carex prasina*), muskroot (*Adoxa moschatellina*), purple-stem cliff brake (*Pellaea atropurpurea*), arctic primrose (*Primula mistassinica*) and the state threatened cliff cudweed (*Pseudognaphalium saxicola*), a central Wisconsin endemic found nowhere else in the world.

Noteworthy plant communities found on the Kickapoo Valley Reserve include oak savanna with an understory of native grasses, flowers and forbs, dry prairie remnants, hemlock and pine relicts, river and yellow birch floodplain forest.



Dark sky conservation highlights emerging research showing how artificial light is disrupting our sleep, destroying our health, degrading our environment, interfering with pollinators, and confusing migrators. We are losing our heritage of a night sky that has inspired so much science, art, music, and literature. Simple steps can be taken to take back the night and preserve the darkness the natural world depends on.

Over 100 species of nesting birds have been identified in the Reserve. Some rare species include Red-shouldered Hawk (*Buteo lineatus*), Acadian Flycatcher (*Empidonax virescens*), Cerulean (*Dendroica cerulea*), Kentucky (*Oporonix formosus*), and Worm-eating (*Helminthos vermivorous*) warblers and Louisiana Waterthrush (*Seiurus motacilla*).



The Reserve is home to the threatened Blanding's turtle (*Emydoidea blandingii*), Wood turtle (*Clemmys insculpta*) and a species of special concern, the Cherrystone Drop (*Hendersonia occulta*) which is a globally rare snail found on cool, moist, rocky slopes.



The rusty patch bumble bee (*Bombus affinis*) is an endangered species found on the Kickapoo Valley Reserve. The rusty patched bumble bee live in colonies in tall grass prairies that also contain flowers for nectar in areas where the soil is undisturbed to protect their underground nest building colonies.

Recreation

Visitors to the Reserve can hike, bike, canoe, kayak, camp, horseback ride, cross-country ski, snowshoe and snowmobile. Low impact recreation activities are an important way we can protect the property.

- Camp at designated sites only. Camping is primitive with no toilets or water. Sites need to be booked online or at the Visitor Center. A camping permit is required.
- Along Old Hwy 131, equestrians should use gravel/grass side only. Stock should stay off pavement where possible.
- Cross-country ski and snowmobile trails are groomed when conditions permit. Winter Trail map is available in season.
- Walking or snowshoeing on cross-country ski trails, groomed or ungroomed, is prohibited.
- Hiking to the ice formations requires a pass.
- Trail/parking passes and/or camping permits are required. Passes and permits are available online or in person at the Visitor Center.

Events and Programs



Winter Festival is the first Saturday after a full week in January. Visitors can enjoy a family friendly, outdoor winter event that highlights all the wonders of enjoying winter outdoors. Admission is free and the event is open to the public.

Dam Challenge Triathlon is the first Saturday in October. Participants are challenged to paddle 7 miles, bike 15 miles and run 3.5 miles in and around the Reserve. Race registration fills quickly. View the KVR website for details.

