

**Kickapoo Reserve Management Board**  
**Meeting Minutes for July 17, 2025**  
Kickapoo Valley Reserve Visitor Center

**Board members present:** Travis Downing (Chair), Scott Lind, Luke Zahm, Reggie Nelson, Joel Charles, Lyndsey Winchel

**Board members absent:** Kjetil Garvin, Bill Quackenbush, Barb Sarnowski

**Staff members present:** Jason Leis, Amy Dvorak, Jackie Yocum, Jesse Haney, Amber Burch

**Others in attendance:** Lonnie Muller (Episcope), Emily Schendel, Brad Steinmetz, Jonel Kiesau, Jen Oium (via Zoom), Julie Hoel (via Zoom)

Chair Downing called the meeting to order at 6:18 PM.

Downing read the Land Acknowledgement Statement.

Lind made a motion to approve the agenda. Charles seconded the motion. The motion passed with all ayes.

Leis confirmed the agenda was properly posted.

Downing introduced Lyndsey Winchel, the new board member, who is the tourism representative. Winchel said her family is from Valley.

**Public input:**

Downing welcomed Emily Schendel, the Kickapoo Valley Forest School Governance Council President. Schendel read a comment that she sent to the board members on behalf of the Governance Council. In summary, the comment stated they request the board explore all options to transfer the two Prairie Springs buildings to the Forest School before the board takes action to consider a sale. They requested confirmation in writing that all pertinent information regarding the building's construction funding and avenues of ownership transfer have been explored.

Downing welcomed Brad Steinmetz, a donor to the Forest School. He indicated he would like the Prairie Springs buildings donated to the Forest School if possible because he believes the money was donated for the Forest School. He said the community is for the Forest School.

Charles motioned to approve the minutes from the June 2025 meeting, and Zahm seconded. The motion passed with all ayes.

**Friends of KVR Update:**

No one from the Friends of KVR was in attendance. Zahm said the Friends received a check from the Viroqua Food Coop's Give Where You Live program. Yocum said the Garden Tour went well.

**Discussion and possible action regarding keeping or requesting the State Building Commission to sell Prairie Springs building 1 and/or Prairie Springs building 2:**

Zahm said he spoke by phone with the Youth Services Coordinator for the Ho-Chunk Nation to get their perspective on the situation since the two Ho-Chunk Nation members on the board could not attend tonight's meeting. They have an interest in educational programs at the Reserve, but it's not hinged on the two buildings. Charles and Zahm discussed including the Ho-Chunk Nation's perspective on the buildings into the larger discussion. Downing said it was brought to his attention that since there was no Ho-Chunk representation at the meeting, the board should table the vote. Charles and Winchel agreed.

Zahm spoke with Secretary Kathy Blumenfeld. She had a loose understanding of the situation. Secretary Blumenfeld recommended the board make a motion for the DOA to create a memo, so the DOA can lay out the stakeholders and provide an advisory service for the board to better understand the long-range implications if Prairie Springs 1 and 2 leave the Reserve. She said there is no money to extract the buildings from their sites and relocate them.

Charles said multiple community members and donors said the intention of their donation was for the buildings to be used by the Forest School. No evidence has been presented to the contrary. He asked if anyone disagreed. Zahm said the executive director of the Reserve at the time advocated fundraising for the buildings, which makes things slightly unclear. Lind said he put in many hours of volunteer labor to build the first building, and if he thought the building would be solely used for the Forest School, he wouldn't have built it. Charles said the applications to the State Building Commission (SBC) clearly indicate the buildings would be used by the Forest School with an ancillary benefit to the Reserve. He asked if the board agreed they should exhaust all options to transfer the buildings in a way that does not have a significant cost to the Reserve. Lind agreed.

Zahm said the other perspective is the Reserve was crunched on educational space at the time, so when Prairie Springs 1 was being built, there were a lot of conversations about needing space. He said once the buildings became property of the state, it became their property to do what they want with. Downing said if we decide to get rid of the buildings, they will go up for auction or sealed bid. Charles disagreed and said we don't know that.

Downing said he doesn't feel the buildings should be given to the Forest School because they are being used by the Reserve's education program. He said if the SBC agrees to sell the buildings, it's possible none of us will get the buildings, and it's highly likely the state will not give the Reserve any money for education buildings in the future. Charles said we don't know that. Downing said when we asked the state two times, they gave the same answer. He said contrary to popular belief, the Forest School decided to leave the Reserve; we did not kick them out.

Charles said he feels we need to gather more information at this time. He would like the board to craft the information delivered to the DOA. Charles asked if we could send a letter to the SBC.

Winchel asked if we could find an agreement with the Forest School to provide access to the buildings while they are at the Reserve. Zahm said the Forest School still has access for \$25 per

day. Winchel suggested bringing the community into the discussion. Downing said we still must find out what we can do with the buildings first.

Charles said he would like the board to send a letter to the DOA and SBC asking what our options are. Downing said it will be on next month's agenda. Charles said he will not be at the next two meetings, but he wants to be involved.

Zahm asked if an ad hoc committee should be formed. It was decided the members of the committee will be chosen at the next meeting.

Zahm asked if a letter should be drafted to send to donors of the buildings to let them know we are working toward a solution. Lind did not feel it was necessary because these meetings are public, so if anyone was interested, they could attend the meetings or read the minutes.

This topic will be tabled until after the ad hoc committee drafts a letter and hears something back from the DOA and SBC.

Charles made a motion to form an ad hoc committee to draft letters to be sent to the DOA and SBC regarding options for disposal of Prairie Springs 1 and 2. Lind seconded. Downing asked if the committee was to be formed at the next board meeting, and Zahm said yes. There was a discussion about who should be on the committee, including donors and the Forest School.

Zahm asked for the motion to be restated. Charles made motion to form an ad hoc committee representing board members, community members who donated, and the Forest School to be appointed by the chair with the purpose of drafting two letters – one to the Department of Administration and one to the State Building Commission – regarding the options for the disposal of Prairie Springs 1 and 2. Lind seconded the motion. The motion passed with all ayes.

#### **Education and Tourism Committee:**

There was no committee meeting since the June 2025 board meeting.

The next Education and Tourism Committee meeting is scheduled for August 14, 2025, at 5:30 PM at the Kickapoo Valley Reserve Visitor Center.

#### **Finance Committee:**

There was no committee meeting since the June 2025 board meeting.

The next Finance Committee meeting is scheduled for August 4, 2025, at 9:00 AM at the Kickapoo Valley Reserve Visitor Center.

#### **Land Management Committee:**

There was a collaboration between the KVR and the Ho-Chunk Nation to plant native grasses and pollinator habitat on 150 acres. Forty trees will be planted on five acres near Jug Creek. Almost all of the milkweed has been planted. All of the campsites were inspected, which occurs every few years, and it went well. The committee reviewed the five-year management plan.

Haney provided a law enforcement update. Most of our enforcement is done through notification with courtesy notices. Haney shared that we've received over 50% compliance with the courtesy notices. We did a mutual-aid search and rescue in Wildcat Mountain State Park. Haney has assisted the Vernon County Sheriff's Office with a few calls.

The next Land Management Committee meeting is scheduled for September 9, 2025, at 5:30 PM at the Kickapoo Valley Reserve Visitor Center.

**Election of Officers:**

Leis said Barb Sarnowski was willing to continue as vice-chair.

The meeting was turned over to Zahm to guide the chair nominations. Lind nominated Downing as chair. Downing accepted the nomination. There were no other nominations. All members voted aye for Downing as chair. The meeting was turned back to Downing.

Downing nominated Zahm as secretary. Zahm nominated Charles. Charles declined. All members voted aye for Zahm as secretary.

Downing asked for vice-chair nominations. Lind nominated Sarnowski. There were no other nominations. All members voted aye for Sarnowski as vice-chair.

**Other issues:**

Charles requested the August agenda say, "Formation of Ad Hoc Committee for Prairie Springs". Zahm asked if there was a sunset on the Forest School ad hoc committee previously formed. Kiesau, an audience member, said there was a deadline.

**Adjournment:**

Charles made a motion and Nelson seconded to adjourn the meeting. It passed with all ayes. The meeting adjourned at 7:44 PM.

The next meeting is scheduled for August 21, 2025, at 6:00 PM at the Kickapoo Valley Reserve Visitor Center.



Minutes transcribed by Amy Dvorak, Executive Assistant