

**Kickapoo Reserve Management Board  
Meeting Minutes for May 15, 2025**  
Kickapoo Valley Reserve Visitor Center

**Board members present:** Travis Downing (Chair), Scott Lind, Luke Zahm, Barb Sarnowski, Reggie Nelson, Joel Charles (via Zoom),

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

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

**Others in attendance:** Lonnie Muller (Episcope), Carolyn Scott, Jay Scott, Katee Heisel, Emily Schendel, Jen Oium, Keith Ashley-Wright, Curt Parr, Don Warnke, Lindsey Winchel, one unknown guest, Beth Thayer (via Zoom), Matthew Zarnoth (via Zoom), Damian Dinger (via Zoom), Jonel Kiseau (via Zoom), Julie Hoel (via Zoom), Stacey Fahey (via Zoom), Anne-Marie Fryer (via Zoom), Marcy West (via Zoom)

Chair Downing called the meeting to order at 6:02 PM.

Downing read the Land Acknowledgement Statement.

Lind made a motion to approve the agenda. Nelson seconded the motion, and the motion carried with all ayes.

Leis confirmed the agenda was properly posted.

**Public input:** Downing said there was one request from Emily Schendel, the president of the Kickapoo Valley Forest School (KVFS) Governance Council, to speak.

Schendel, accompanied by Jay Scott and Carolyn Scott, spoke. She indicated it was not a pre-approved statement from the Governance Council but was a collection of thoughts, information received, and her personal thoughts.

Schendel said their understanding from the April 2025 KRMB meeting was there would be open and transparent communication between the KRMB, Jay and Carolyn Scott, and the Governance Council. She felt there was poor communication between the April meeting and this month's meeting regarding the future of the Prairie Springs buildings.

Schendel said per a discussion with Senator Brad Pfaff's office, the KRMB should formally request the State Building Commission to transfer the buildings to the KVFS.

**Friends of KVR Update:**

Katee Heisel, the vice president of the Friends of KVR, provided an update. The Earth Day poetry contest and highway cleanup went well. They are preparing for the annual volunteer appreciation potluck in La Farge Village Park on June 20, 2025 and planning the Garden Tour,

which will be held on July 13, 2025. The Friends of KVR are looking to work with a local webmaster to redesign the Friends of KVR website.

**Discussion of April 17, 2025, Board Meeting, specifically the vote regarding Prairie Springs 1 and 2:**

Downing and Leis contacted an attorney to determine if the motion made regarding Prairie Springs 1 and 2 was legal. The motion from the meeting read, "...for the Kickapoo Reserve Management Board to explicitly state the intention and desired goal to transfer ownership of Prairie Springs 1 and 2 to the Kickapoo Valley Forest School or La Farge School District pending information regarding options for that process from the State of Wisconsin." Downing said the motion was not legal due to the reasonableness test as the agenda did not properly specify that the discussion and possible vote on transferring ownership of the buildings was a possibility.

A discussion ensued regarding whether the vote is null and, if so, what is needed to rectify it. Charles asked how the item was originally put onto the April 2025 meeting agenda and who writes the agendas. Downing said the Scotts contacted him about speaking at the meeting, so he put them on the public input portion of the agenda. They wanted to be a specific agenda item, so Downing moved them to an agenda item. Leis writes the agendas, which are approved by Downing.

**Approval of April 17, 2025 minutes:**

Downing asked if the minutes needed to be changed to indicate the vote was improper. Leis said no. There were questions from Lind and Charles on the wording needed and if it would be in the April 2025 minutes or the minutes from this meeting. Leis said he was advised to indicate in the minutes that the motion was improper. There was further discussion on how to indicate the improper vote.

Lind requested to include the email from Nathan Judnic, Legal Counsel for the Department of Administration, regarding the improper motion into the April meeting minutes.

Lind made a motion to add to our records the Nathan Judnic email as it pertains to the minutes from the last meeting, and if we need to amend those minutes later, we can address that at a future meeting. Charles seconded the motion, and it passed with all ayes.

**Update on answers to questions asked of the State Building Commission and DOA attorneys:**

Downing said the Board was emailed all the answers to the questions. The questions and answers were shared on the screen.

Charles asked if the responses from Nathan Judnic, Legal Counsel for the Department of Administration, were based on information Leis provided him. Leis said he sent the questions the Monday prior to the April board meeting to RJ Binau, Deputy Administrator for Facilities Development and member of the State Building Commission, who sent it to their attorneys, Nathan Judnic and William Ramsey, for their opinions. The questions were read at the April meeting, but we did not have the answers yet.

Zahm read the questions and answers out loud. Per Leis, the answers are from a conversation between Judnic, Binau, and Ramsey, although Judnic was the one to email the answers to him.

Question one asked, "Can the KRMB/State of WI give buildings to a school at no charge?" The answer summary is the sale of the buildings is subject to a request and approval by the State Building Commission (SBC). The sale must be approved by the Joint Committee on Finance (JCF). The KRMB does not have the independent authority under their statute to transfer the buildings to the KVFS.

Question two asked, "If gifting them to the school is not allowed, would sale or auction be allowed? If so, can you sell to a specific organization and how is the price determined?" The answer summary is any proposed sale would need to be approved by the SBC and JCF. The sale would need to be based on bids or based on negotiated prices as determined through a competitive or transparent process. Judnic, Binau, and Ramsey mentioned the possibility of the SBC rejecting, or questioning, the request as the buildings would need to be physically detached from their current anchor and pier systems and moved to an unknown location.

Question three asked, "Any other issues you see as problems?" The answer summary is the SBC would want to know why there is a desire to sell these buildings when it is clear they would be utilized for KVR educational programming. The concern is there would be little chance that the KVR could obtain approval to expand the facilities for educational purposes again if these buildings are sold.

Downing reiterated that if the buildings were sold, there would be little chance of the KVR gaining approval to expand the facility for educational purposes in the future. Lind said he was not concerned about it.

Charles asked what Judnic's role is that makes him an expert on the topic. Leis said Binau is the deputy administrator of the SBC, and he was part of generating the answers. Charles said Judnic does not appear to understand what happened with the buildings. He said there has not been any evidence presented that suggested the primary purpose of the buildings was for KVR educational activities independent of the KVFS. He would like to know how the SBC would feel if they understood the nuances of the situation.

Zahm requested for Agency Request for State Building Commission Action May 2021 Request #25 to be pulled up on the screen, which was done. The Project Justification indicates, "In 2019, over 5,000 students attended field trips, summer (day) camps and special events at the Kickapoo Valley Forest School. The Kickapoo Valley Reserve Education Program is based in the Visitor Center building. During popular spring field trip season there are times when the Visitor Center could not accommodate large school groups or multiple groups. Planning for additional education space accelerated in 2020."

Leis noted the KVFS did not exist in 2019, so the numbers provided were from the KVR education programs. Charles said it was likely a typo. He referred to the Project Description, which said, "The building will be a 500 square foot structure near the current Visitor Center and

will to serve sixteen students and two teachers for the fall of 2021.” Charles said this shows the idea from the beginning was for the buildings to be for the KVFS with some benefit to the KVR. He said we should reapproach the SBC and indicate the buildings were for the KVFS, but the KVFS is no longer at the KVR. Charles asked for more communication with Judnic, Binau, and the SBC to gauge how they would react to a question like this.

Zahm disagreed. He said we are currently trying to untangle a project that was quickly put together. He said we are caught in a bureaucratic crossfire of why and how the SBC was originally petitioned using the KVR’s education program numbers to justify the need to accommodate the KVFS. Zahm said he doesn’t know what the needs of the KVR will look like in 10 or 20 years, and he is nervous to pull apart and undo something that could tie the KVR into an organization that doesn’t have the capacity to grow or to serve the people of the valley in the ways it sees fit.

Charles asked what the argument is against communicating more information to Judnic, Binau, and the SBC to gauge how they would react to this situation. Charles acknowledged Zahm’s concern about the sale of the buildings limiting future expansion for the KVR. Zahm said he does not have an argument against it but reminded everyone that we are accruing legal costs. He said he doesn’t feel comfortable trying to poke holes in the DOA attorney’s argument on behalf of one entity or another that would leave the KVR holding the bag at the end of the day.

Charles said we need to respect the fact that there was a unanimous vote from the board members present at the last meeting, although that vote is not valid. Zahm said it was a vote of intention. Charles said we need more information. He said the board members have a clear general opinion that the way to do right by the KVFS, if it doesn’t harm the KVR, is to transfer the buildings to them. He acknowledged the vote at the April meeting was improper. Lind said if Judnic’s opinion is correct, then we have to do a formal request to the SBC to gather any more information.

Downing asked what we should ask Judnic. Lind said the answers received were from Judnic, not the SBC. Leis clarified the director of the SBC was involved in generating the answers that Judnic sent. Charles said there has been no evidence showing the original intent of the buildings was for the KVR, but in reading Judnic’s response, Judnic believes that was the original intent. The question Charles wants to ask Judnic is it’s the understanding of the current KRMB, and it was the understanding of the KRMB at the time, that the original purpose of the buildings was primarily for the KVFS with an ancillary benefit to the KVR. Now knowing the history and original intention of the buildings, does Judnic still feel like putting this request to the SBC would limit the future ability of the KVR to expand for educational purposes.

Zahm said when the board voted to move the buildings away from the Visitor Center and place them on property off Corps Road, there was a discussion with the KVFS Governance Council about setting up a meeting with the Ho-Chunk Nation Legislative Affairs Aid Ryan Greendeer to discuss where the Nation preferred the buildings to be relocated. The KVFS Governance Council decided to vacate their request for development on Corps Road, and that was the last time we heard there was interest in relocating the KVFS on the KVR. Zahm said it was a decision to vacate as opposed to an expulsion.

Zahm said the decision is whether we make a petition to the SBC to have the buildings removed from the KVR and jeopardize future building requests on behalf of the KVR. Charles clarified that no one objects to the fundamental premise that the buildings were originally for the KVFS. All board members present agreed.

Lind said his opinion about not needing to expand the education program is clear because his priorities are not education at KVR. His priorities are to preserve and protect the land. Lind said he believes we have enough space for education already. However, if we have to sell the buildings to the highest bidder as opposed to giving them to the KVFS, it raises more questions for him.

Lind said he would like to ask Judnic if there is anything in the state's history of deeding real property to a municipality at less than market value, and if not, is it a possibility.

Downing said if he could give the buildings away without jeopardizing the future of the KVR, he would. Charles said he would like to hear what the state has to say then have a conversation with more board members.

**Discussion and possible action item regarding re-dedication statement at the June 7, 2025, ceremony:**

Examples of the rededication statement were shown on the screen. Leis asked the board members if they wanted to make a statement at the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary rededication ceremony. Lind said he would like the State of Wisconsin, Ho-Chunk Nation, and KRMB to reaffirm our dedication to the original intent of the KVR without trying to restate it. A discussion ensued. Because no one from the Ho-Chunk Nation was at the meeting, it was decided to forego an official statement.

**Education and Tourism Committee:**

Sarnowski said after the last meeting, they are nearly done with the management plan. Burch acknowledged that Sarnowski is now the chair of the committee.

Lind said at the previous Land Management Committee meeting, he asked about sharing the Land Management and Education and Tourism plans between the two committees before bringing them before the full board. He said it would be a way to make sure the two plans are going in the same direction before they are put together into a master plan to bring in front of the board.

The next Education and Tourism Committee meeting is scheduled for June 12, 2025, at 5:30 PM at the Kickapoo Valley Reserve Visitor Center.

**Finance Committee:**

No updates as there was no meeting last month. Zahm said we are waiting on a meeting with the DOA finance group to learn how the budget sits as we near the end of the fiscal year.

The next Finance Committee meeting is scheduled for June 2, 2025, at 9:00 AM at the Kickapoo Valley Reserve Visitor Center.

**Land Management Committee:**

Downing said at the last committee meeting, they went over the cultural management plan. Bill Quackenbush had a few minor changes.

We put in five to six acres of pollinator habitat between Mule Trail and Bridge 15. About 1.2 acres of pollinator habitat was put in at the weather station by the Visitor Center. Education groups and volunteers have been pulling invasive plants. We purchased 1,600 milkweed plugs to be planted this year. The campsites have been really full. The reservation system has been working really well.

Haney provided an enforcement update. We've seen an uptick in activities. There have been no major violations. Horse and bike trails were opened May 5, 2025. Light canoeing activity so far. Lind asked if we have had any issues of campsites being left trashed. Haney said no.

The next Land Management Committee meeting is scheduled for June 10, 2025, at 5:30 PM at the Kickapoo Valley Reserve Visitor Center.

**Other issues:**

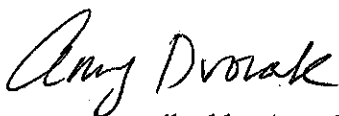
Downing said the next board meeting is scheduled for June 19, 2025, but he hopes to reschedule it to June 26, 2025 due a prior conflict. Everyone agreed on the new date. It will be a field trip and elections of officers. The meeting will start at the Visitor Center then head out to the property. Lind requested to go to a state natural area.

Lind said he replaced the wall lights on the outside of the Visitor Center with the lights paid for by the Friends of KVR. The light for the maintenance building will be installed in June. All feedback has been positive so far.

**Adjournment:**

Zahm made a motion and Lind seconded to adjourn the meeting. It passed with all ayes. The meeting adjourned at 7:34 PM.

The next meeting is scheduled for June 26, 2025, at 6:00 PM at the Kickapoo Valley Reserve Visitor Center.



Minutes transcribed by Amy Dvorak, 5/29/2025