

TOURISM MANAGEMENT PLAN



Overview

Consistent with the historical and administrative directives, the commitment to managing for tourists on the Kickapoo Valley Reserve (Reserve) has evolved into a significant function for the Kickapoo Reserve Management Board (KRMB) and staff.

Formal declarations committing to Tourism enhancement include:

“The Reserve will be preserved in a natural state and developed only to the extent necessary to enhance outdoor recreational and educational opportunities.”
(Memorandum of Understanding and Joint Management Plan – State of Wisconsin and Ho-Chunk Nation – Attachment 5)

“The KRMB shall manage land in the Reserve to preserve and enhance its unique environmental, scenic, and cultural features; to provide facilities for the use and enjoyment of visitors to the Reserve; and to promote the Reserve as a destination for low-impact vacationing and recreation [section 41.41(3), Wisconsin State Statutes].”
(Attachment 1)

For management purposes, *low-impact* is defined as having minimal effect, influence, or intrusion upon the environment and ecosystems; insignificant disturbance that does not adversely alter the land or the natural experiences of other visitors; and activities that do not substantially impair the conservation and preservation of the property.

Currently, recreational opportunities on the Reserve include hiking, biking, equestrian riding, canoeing, kayaking, hunting, fishing, primitive camping, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, and bird watching. Pursuits such as hiking, hunting, snowshoeing, and bird-watching are allowed throughout the 8,569 acres; biking, horse/mule riding, cross-country skiing, and snowmobiling are directed to designated trails. Obviously, fishing, canoeing, and kayaking are dictated by the river and its tributaries.

By the Numbers:

Activity	Availability (Approximate as of 2010 season)
Hiking – although hiking is allowed throughout; some trails are specified for “hiking only.”	6 miles of “hikers only”
Biking – including Old 131 Trail and mountain bike trails.	23 miles
Equestrian – primarily mule and horse, but requests have been received for llama	39 miles
Cross-country skiing – true back-country skiing is allowed throughout the 8,569 acres	10 miles (groomed)
Snowmobiling	15 miles
Canoe/Kayak	14 Kickapoo River miles within Reserve; five parking areas and access ramps
Camp areas	28 designated sites or areas

It is important to note that the maintenance of the Reserve trails is primarily done through hired staff – both full-time and limited term employees (LTEs); however, a variety of organizations, consultants, and individuals also assist with construction, maintenance, grooming, and repair.

In addition, a variety of special events such as the annual Winter Festival and Dam Challenge Triathlon attract tourists for recreation and/or hands-on education. The Visitor Center serves as a tourist information center for the area.

Mission

The KRMB will encourage tourists to visit the Kickapoo Valley Reserve and will strive to enhance visitors’ low-impact use and enjoyment of the Reserve while preserving the unique environmental, scenic, and cultural features. A variety of recreational experiences will be maintained which will expand and enhance visitors’ appreciation and understanding of the Reserve’s natural beauty, ecosystems and history. However, the protection and preservation of natural resources will have priority over public access when recreational activities threaten the resources.

Policies

- Any activity that threatens the ecosystems and quality of the property will not be allowed. Special event requests are considered on a case-by-case basis and will not be approved if the KRMB or staff feels the event or its management could negatively impact the Reserve. A commitment to *quality over quantity* is carried over from the original management plan goals adopted in 1999.
- Wisconsin Administrative Rules (KB1 – Attachment 1) thoroughly illustrate formal board and citizen policy. Rules re-iterate the commitment to protecting the Reserve by authorizing formal

trail closure during poor weather conditions, option to establish protected areas, and guidelines for low-impact camping.

- Fees are established annually through citizen committees with final determination by formal action of the KRMB.
- New trails will be considered with the awareness of maintenance limitations per available staff and budget constraints. Trail re-design or repair will continue to follow stated procedures of evaluating proposed routes for potential impact to archeological, cultural, and environmental resources. Priorities will be determined through the committee structure which encourages public input, and final approval resides with the KRMB.
- Camping continues to be on a first-come-first-served basis; all camping is primitive – no potable water, electrical or toilet facilities available. Capacity limits are dictated by State rules through the Department of Health and Human Services regarding primitive camping and concerns over human waste. Continued support of dispersed camping and that it is a unique, nearly backcountry, camping experience compared to other public properties or private campgrounds. Visitors seeking additional camping amenities will be referred to adjacent Wildcat Mountain State Park and campgrounds maintained by nearby villages or private entities.
- Educate tourists regarding State initiatives to minimize the spread of invasive species.
- Inform visitors of inherent risks of recreation in the Reserve; communication regarding steep terrain, river risks, multiple user groups, and responsibility of the visitor is vital to keeping everyone safe. (Emergency Procedures, Attachment 8)
- Enable the Visitor Center to be used as a Community Resource facility; serving as a site for local government and agency meetings as well as special events.
- The KRMB and staff are responsible for maintaining the Kickapoo River and access points within the Reserve boundaries. Logjams will be made passable; parking areas at Bridges 5, 7, and 14 and access areas at Bare Beach and landing 12 will have waste/recycling containers and porta-potties from May thru October for river users.
- Per s. 41.41, Wis. Stats., the State makes annual Aids in Lieu of Tax payments to the municipalities based on the value of the Reserve property; the Ho-Chunk Nation and State reached agreement on revisions to the State Gaming Compact wherein the tribe could distribute payment directly to counties where lands are held in Trust. In 2010 this agreement resulted in a \$1.2 million dollar payment to Vernon County, due to the 1,200 acres of Trust Land within the Reserve. Both the Aids in Lieu of Tax and Gaming Compact payment are reflections of the public policy that the Reserve property need not be a financial burden to local governments.
- It is not the intent of the KRMB to compete with private tourism businesses through recreational options or facilities. The original intent continues that the Reserve will attract visitors to the area with the hope that they support the area's private businesses and services.



Although recreation activities on the Reserve are low-impact and will be regulated so as not to interfere with the KRMB's mission of preserve and protect, regular (scheduled) maintenance of the trails and campsites will be the most proactive effort taken to limit the damaging effects of recreation activities. It must be noted that the KRMB *may not* be able to meet the satisfaction of every approved user group. Therefore, it is extremely important that each user group makes an effort to compromise when issues arise concerning use and maintenance of the Reserve. The well being of the property should be the first and foremost consideration when issues are discussed and decisions are made. The KRMB will consider the needs of user groups; however, the KRMB will not favor the wishes of any user group over the protection of the resource.

Goals and Objectives:

Goal: To effectively serve visitors, determine the utilization of the Reserve in terms of user groups and preferred recreational pursuits through participatory and observational analysis.

Objectives:

- Continue to conduct annual monitoring of permits sold, event attendance estimates, and number of people stopping in at the Visitor Center.
- Monitor campsites and trailheads to understand recreational/participatory preference.
- Support application to the Nuzum fund for a grant to repeat the 1999 economic impact survey of canoe and trout fishing as an ongoing study specific to two user groups.

Goal: Ensure the sustainability of the Reserve relative to the benefits of and impact from tourism.

Objectives:

- Illustrate the importance of tourism to the quality of life and benefits to the economy for the local and State elected officials with the goal of financial stability.
- Work with area businesses and organizations on initiatives that improve the area economy and in turn support the sustainability of the Reserve.
- Establish a greater enforcement presence at heavily used areas (e.g., campsites, canoe landings, road access) to prevent problems and to determine the number of visitors for use in examining management options.
- Work with user groups and volunteers to monitor, maintain, improve, and reroute trails that are in poor condition, contributing to erosion, or experiencing user conflicts.
- Be mindful of simple management decisions in an effort to minimize impact, i.e., energy efficient lighting, dark sky protection, event supplies, and mechanical uses should be conservation based. (“Walk the Talk”)
- Any accommodations such as benches, bridges, and hitching posts on trails/camp areas will have minimal impact.

Goal: Encourage responsible use of the Reserve while being mindful of short and long term impacts.

Objectives:

- Continue camping policies regarding capacity limits, designation of event reservation and first-come-first-served sites, sites along the river, and group sites.
- Monitor the trail system to ensure it is sustainable long term and minimizes impact to the natural environment.
- Provide ample communication options with users to understand trail and river conditions or other potential issues. Options include website, Facebook, front desk staff, signage, radio public service announcements, voicemail recording, etc.

Goal: Encourage diverse low-impact usage of the Reserve.

Objectives:

- Continue year-round promotion of special events to attract visitors to the area in multiple seasons for a variety of activities.
- Host or highlight events, displays, and exhibits that also serve the local community. The Friends of KVR annual photo contest, monthly Driftless Dialogue series, hikes, art classes, etc. are examples that should be continued.
- Board and staff will continue to research alternative activities as they evolve; bird watching competitions, geo-caching and ski-joring were not even considered ten years ago. Technology and creativity will continue to introduce new recreation options.

Goal: Work with organizations that support the mission of the Reserve.

Objectives:

- Continue the close working relationship with the Friends of the Kickapoo Valley Reserve as referenced in s. 41.41, Wis. Stats. Provide administrative support when available and as requested.
- Co-sponsor conferences, presentations, classes that match the policies and goals of the Reserve with not-for-profit groups. Previous events included work with the Kickapoo Woods Cooperative, Valley Stewardship Network, Wisconsin Humanities Council, Trout Unlimited, Wisconsin Horse Council, Vernon Trails, and Audubon Society.

Goal: Work with resource experts and users to explore trail network suitability and sustainability.

Objectives:

- Work to create more options for hikers, possibly more trails and more opportunities for hiking into the interior, and prepare self-guided interpretive hikes through signage and/or informative brochures.
- Consider developing a more challenging loop for bikers on the south end of the Reserve, i.e., Hansen's Hollow area. Research options for construction of a "simple" trail bridge at the former Bridge 17 area.
- Create a handicap accessible/elder-friendly trail loop from the Visitor Center—possibly a ½- to 1-mile loop with interpretive signs and/or brochure.

Action Items for 2010-2015:

1. Complete the handicap access loop and hiking trail loop south of the Visitor Center.
2. Replace surface material of Old 131 Trail – Shared in Finance Management Plan.
3. Continue to improve year-round events to attract new and repeat visitors.
4. Plan and host a special celebration for the ten year (2014) anniversary of the Visitor Center.
5. Host a meeting with area tourism businesses to encourage dialogue of ideas that could enhance tourism dollars.



Review of 2005-2010 Tourism Management Plan Evaluation Methods:	
Evaluation markers proposed in 2005	Proof of Accomplishment
Knowledge gained from monitoring and research activities will be used to adjust management accordingly.	Management adjusted accordingly. Examples: educate riders regarding multi-use/shared trails, sustainable trail design and construction, Visitor Center hours on weekends, etc.
Distribute 6,500 brochures annually.	Approximately 10,000 Visitor Guides distributed annually and 2000 new education and event brochures in 2010.
Develop and maintain a spreadsheet of visitor registration through permits. Tally the number of visitors to the Visitor Center. 6,992 hits to the website in October 2005.	Spreadsheet tallies annual, day use, and camping permits issued. Annual tally: 2005 hosted 10,300 visitors and in 2009 hosted nearly 14,000 visitors. 17,427 hits to the website in October 2010 and started a Facebook page that links 270 "Friends".
Address sections of eroding trails with erosion control measures.	Following the 2007 and 2008 floods – entire trail from Dutch Hollow Road to Hay Valley re-designed, constructed, and improved; continuous improvement to all segments of trail.
Tally volunteer hours on an annual basis for litter cleanup, trail improvement work, and office assistance.	Adopt-a-trail program has 28.6 miles of trail monitored and basic maintenance provided by volunteers. In addition, over 100 volunteers per event assist with the Winter Festival and Dam Challenge.
Develop a visitor impact inventory that documents recreation impact on the natural features of the Reserve and the economic impact of tourists on the area.	Continued to 2010-2015 priority objectives. (See Finance Management Plan.)
Attendance at special events and annual visitor counts increase.	Winter Festival participants increased from 200-500 people; determined Dam Challenge registration cap needed to be imposed at 500 racers; annual and day use permits 2,104.
Indicators through specific surveys or annual State of Wisconsin Department of Tourism reports from private tourism-related businesses show economic improvements each year allowing the KRMB to gauge the ripple effect the Reserve has on the area economy.	Reports reflect negative impact of 2008-2009 recession. Objective continued: See 2010-2015 Action Items.