

**Kickapoo Reserve Management Board
Meeting Minutes for July 16, 2026**
Kickapoo Valley Reserve Visitor Center

Board members present: Travis Downing (Chair), Dan Catherman (via Zoom), Kjetil Garvin, Scott Lind, Reggie Nelson, Bill Quackenbush (via Zoom), Kelly Rueckheim, Barb Sarnowski, Damian Thundercloud, Lyndsey Winchel, Luke Zahm (via Zoom)

Board members absent: None.

Staff members present: Jason Leis, Amy Dvorak, Jesse Haney, Danae Gardner

Others in attendance: Christian Malanka, Jody Rader, Kristina Ralph, Vernon Reporter (via Zoom), Jonel Kiseau (via Zoom), Amy Volliva (via Zoom), 608-521-0248 (via Zoom), Guest (via Zoom)

Chair Downing called the meeting to order at 6:01 p.m.

Downing read the Land Acknowledgement Statement.

Zahm made a motion to approve the agenda, and Nelson seconded. The motion passed with all ayes.

Leis confirmed the agenda was properly posted.

Thundercloud motioned to approve the minutes from the June 2026 meeting. Lind seconded the motion, and it passed with all ayes. Winchel requested all position descriptions for jobs at the Reserve. Leis said he would send those.

Chairperson and/or Executive Director report:

None.

Budget Report:

Leis said there was no update to the budget report because the DOA BFM accountants are busy with end of the year activities.

Friends of KVR Update:

Jody Rader said the Garden Tour was last weekend and was successful. The next Friends of KVR meeting is August 5. They are planning the staff appreciation dinner. The Friends board will have a strategic planning meeting at the end of August. There are two open board positions.

Public appearances:

None.

Revisiting the future of the outdoor classrooms:

Thundercloud said the Ho-Chunk Nation made three recommendations: give both buildings back to the Kickapoo Valley Forest School (KVFS), the KVR gets one and the school gets one, or the Nation gets both buildings. He said the Nation understands the decision is up to the Board, and they understand the intentions of the foundation who funded the buildings. Thundercloud said the Nation saw a potential path forward through the State with the Department of Administration if deciding to give the buildings to the KVFS.

Winchel made a motion to form an ad hoc committee that includes the KVFS, the Fleckenstein Family Foundation, and anyone else who wants to be part of making the decision of what to do with the buildings. Zahm seconded the motion.

Zahm asked for the purpose of the ad hoc committee. Winchel said it would be for public relations and to utilize information input from everyone on how to best use the buildings. Rueckheim asked Leis if the buildings have to go to auction if the Reserve gives them up, and Leis said yes. Leis said he got an opinion from two attorneys at the State of Wisconsin and the head of the State Building Commission who said the Board doesn't have the authority to give the buildings away, and the Board would have to tell the SBC that they no longer want the buildings. The SBC normally disposes of State property through a bidding process. Zahm said he spoke with various staffers in the DOA and elected officials in the Senate and State Assembly. He said the elected officials would help get the buildings through the State Building Commission but there was no guarantee. Declaring the buildings as surplus could hurt the Reserve in the future if the Reserve wanted to build something else.

Rueckheim said the ad hoc committee would be useful for determining if the KVFS wants the buildings as well as being a positive public relations effort.

Lind clarified that the ad hoc committee would create a recommendation to the Board to send the letter. Winchel said yes.

The previous ad hoc committee was chaired by a KVFS member and Lind. They started with a planning meeting.

Quackenbush said he would abstain from the vote. He reminded the Board that the decision should be what the Board wants, not what the committee wants. He said the State will see that the Board keeps coming back to ask them the same question.

The motion passed with all ayes except Quackenbush, who abstained from the vote.

Downing said the ad hoc committee should decide on the duration of time needed to make the recommendation to the Board. He said the member limit at 11 people. The committee will be made up of Zahm, Winchel, Rueckheim, Thundercloud, and up to seven members of the public. They must email Downing requesting to be on the committee. The deadline to email Downing is July 30, 2026. The first meeting will be scheduled after that date. Downing told Winchel to share his email address with anyone she would like to see on the committee. Winchel said she would like to see two representatives from the Fleckenstein Family Foundation and two people from the KVFS. It was agreed Downing would tell people they could not join if all 11 seats were filled,

but the Board did not see it being a problem. Leis said he would help with logistics and planning of the first meeting. Leis said he would like to be on the ad hoc committee, and Downing said yes.

Hiring update:

Leis said interviews for the Education Coordinator will happen next week. There are plans to hire one or two more part-time police officers. Rueckheim asked if he could participate in the Education Coordinator interviews. Leis said yes. Thundercloud asked where the salary for the part-time officers comes from and if it impacts the budget. Leis said it would save money because they would work at a lower pay rate than him or Jesse. There was a discussion about how many part-time laborers are on the payroll and the appropriations used to pay for the laborers and police officers.

Education and Tourism Committee:

There was no update.

The next Education and Tourism Committee meeting is scheduled for August 6, 2026, at 5:30 p.m. at the Kickapoo Valley Reserve Visitor Center.

Finance Committee:

The committee discussed large projects that need to be funded as well as where we would like to see a budget increase. Thundercloud said when he spoke with representatives about the Reserve's budget, they seemed open to increasing the budget.

Winchel requested a budget report at all committee meetings. Leis said he could do that.

Lind requested an update on the heat pump and roof project. Downing said the heat pump is ordered and will be installed before winter. Leis said the bid document is ready for the roof, and someone from state facilities came to check the roof. There are some ventilation issues. Leis has not received any solutions from the engineer yet. The Visitor Center and garage roofs will be separate projects.

Leis reviewed the larger projects, which include a vehicle lease, bridge decking on some of the bridges, seal coating the parking lot at the Visitor Center, replacing the John Deere tractor mower, more personnel, raises, signage, website revamp, paving landings 5 and 7, and more outdoor spaces if the outdoor classrooms are removed from the property.

Zahm asked if we could remove conventional agriculture on the Reserve and replace the revenue with conservation programs. Leis said the State of Wisconsin is not eligible for a lot of the programs.

There was a discussion on the process for the Weister Creek Restoration Project and where the funding came from. The discussion continued into how we could find recurring funding and what the agricultural leases look like, including the requirements. The end of the current lease cycle is in 2029.

The next Finance Committee meeting is scheduled for September 14, 2026, at 9:00 a.m. at the Kickapoo Valley Reserve Visitor Center.

Land Management Committee:

Downing reviewed the last committee meeting. Quackenbush talked about doing a group visit for staff or the Board to cultural sites on the Reserve. Publications may be updated to clarify that Ho-Chunk Nation land is federal property. It will be discussed at the next committee meeting.

Quackenbush and Winchel will create an on-boarding packet for any future land management committee members. It was noted that Quackenbush retired from the Ho-Chunk Nation.

The next Land Management Committee meeting is scheduled for September 8, 2026, at 5:30 p.m. at the Kickapoo Valley Reserve Visitor Center.

Board Member Matters:

None.

Request for future agenda topics:

Winchel requested a standing agenda item on an update on the land transfer with Vernel Vesbach.

Downing requested an update on the flower garden in front of the Visitor Center. Leis said there is already a plan to update the garden with one of the Master Naturalists using it as their service project. There are many volunteers to help with it. Sarnowski said she would like an update from the Friends of KVR on the plan. Zahm said he would like to consider having an indigenous garden on the Reserve.

Zahm asked for a standing agenda item on the outdoor classrooms.

Thundercloud made a motion to recess for 10 minutes. Rueckheim seconded the motion, and the motion passed with all ayes.

Closed session:

Thundercloud made a motion to convene into closed session pursuant to Wis. Stat. 19.185(1)(c): Considering employment, promotion, compensation, or performance data of any public employee over which the governmental body has jurisdiction or exercises responsibility with the purpose for discussion of personnel and employment issues. Rueckheim seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Lind made a motion to reconvene into open session, and Rueckheim seconded. The motion passed with all ayes.

Adjournment:

Thundercloud made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Rueckheim seconded, and it passed unanimously with all ayes. The meeting adjourned at 8:21 p.m.

The next meeting is scheduled for August 20, 2026, at 6:00 p.m. at the Kickapoo Valley Reserve Visitor Center.

Minutes transcribed by Amy Dvorak, Executive Assistant