



Legislative Fiscal Bureau

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Joint Committee on Finance

Paper #726

Kickapoo Valley Reserve Visitor Center (Tourism)

[LFB 2003-05 Budget Summary: Page 406, #5]

CURRENT LAW

The Kickapoo Valley Reserve refers to approximately 8,600 acres of land north of La Farge in Vernon County. The property was the site of a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers dam and reservoir project on the Kickapoo River that was abandoned in approximately 1975. The Corps transferred ownership of approximately 7,400 acres to the State of Wisconsin in December, 2000. Additionally, 1,200 acres were transferred to the Bureau of Indian Affairs in trust for sites sacred to the Ho-Chunk tribe. As agreed upon in a 1997 memorandum of understanding (MOU), the property is managed as one acreage by the Kickapoo Valley Reserve Board and the Ho-Chunk Nation.

Appropriations from the forestry account of the conservation fund support administrative functions for the Kickapoo Reserve Management Board. The Board is responsible for: (a) managing the land in the Kickapoo River Valley; (b) providing facilities for the use and enjoyment of visitors to the Reserve; and (c) promoting the Reserve as a destination for vacationing and recreation.

2001 Act 16 (the 2001-03 biennial budget act) earmarked \$2,370,000 from stewardship 2000 program general obligation bonding for the construction of a visitor center and administration building at the Kickapoo Valley Reserve.

The Reserve is appropriated base funding of \$204,000 SEG annually, from the forestry account of the conservation fund, for the Reserve's general operations.

GOVERNOR

Provide \$55,000 annually from the forestry account of the conservation fund for operation and maintenance costs of a new office and visitor center in the Kickapoo Valley Reserve that is expected to be completed in 2003-04.

DISCUSSION POINTS

1. The current building the Reserve leases for an office and visitor center is 960 square feet, with an additional 960 square feet of garage and storage space. The Reserve's lease on this building has been on a month-to-month basis since July, 2002, pending the construction of the new center. Rent on the current building is \$1,250 per month, including utilities and snow and waste removal. Total visitors to the Reserve last year are estimated to be in excess of 4,000 (over 1,000 for opening weekend of gun deer season alone, over 1,000 for pheasant hunting, over 1,100 registered or bought non-hunting day-use permits, and over 500 for educational classes). The figure excludes an estimate of over 16,000 canoeists who paddled through the Reserve in 2002.

2. Construction of the new office and visitor center for the Kickapoo Valley Reserve is set to begin by May of 2003. By the end of January, 2004, construction on the visitor center is expected to be completed. However, Reserve officials are hoping to start operating in the new office space as early as November, 2003. The new center will be a total of 9,600 square feet (which includes a main building of 8,300 square feet and a garage and public bathroom of 1,300 square feet). The center is expected to attract perhaps 10,000 visitors in its first full year of operations. In addition, educational classes on Reserve history, geology, environment, and resources will be held at the new center.

3. Operational costs of \$55,000 annually for the visitor center under the bill are based on the costs of buildings of similar size and an estimate of about \$5 per square foot per year used by DNR for its facilities (plus snow and waste removal). The operations budget would include: \$24,000 for utility costs, \$22,000 for a custodial service contract and related supplies, \$5,000 for snow and waste removal, \$2,500 for interactive exhibit maintenance and \$1,500 for septic system and equipment maintenance. The interactive exhibits will use approximately one-third of the new space in the visitor center. Current plans for this exhibit include a video/DVD player, headphones and tape recorders, a river model, special lighting, educational handouts and printing. Since the Reserve expends over \$1,200 a month for the lease of its current building space, the amount appropriated can be reduced to \$53,800 annually.

4. Assuming the Reserve is able to occupy the building in November of 2003, the facility would be in operation for eight months in fiscal year 2003-04. This would allow a one-third reduction in operations funding and would reduce the amount needed to \$35,900 in 2003-04.

ALTERNATIVES

1. Approve the Governor's recommendation to provide \$55,000 SEG annually from the forestry account of the conservation fund for the operation of the Kickapoo Valley Reserve's new office and visitor center.

2. Reduce the Governor's recommendation by \$19,100 (to \$35,900) in 2003-04 and by \$1,200 in 2004-05 (to \$53,800) to reflect current rental payments and the facility's expected operation of eight months in 2003-04.

Alternative 2	SEG
2003-05 FUNDING (Change to Bill)	- \$20,300

3. Delete provision.

Alternative 3	SEG
2003-05 FUNDING (Change to Bill)	- \$110,000

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