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NEW BASIN DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION SELECTS LEADERS, EMBRACES MISSION

NORTH JUDSON — The Kankakee River Basin and Yellow River Basin Development Commission, the panel newly tasked with coordinating river stewardship for eight Northwest Indiana counties, convened for the first time today. The Indiana General Assembly created the Commission earlier this year to succeed the Kankakee River Basin Commission (KRBC), which served the region for over four decades.

“I served as chairman of the KRBC in its infancy,” said newly elected Commission Chair and St. Joseph County Surveyor John McNamara. “After decades of work, it is deeply gratifying to lead this next level of commitment to flood protection, economic development, and natural resources in our region.”

Also selected today were Lake County Surveyor Bill Emerson as Vice-Chair; Porter County Engineer Michael Novotney as Secretary; and Starke County Surveyor Bill Crase as Treasurer. Rounding out the panel are Jasper County Commissioner James Walstra; LaPorte County farmer John Coulter, Sr.; Marshall County Surveyor Craig Cultice; and Newton County farmer Rob Churchill. Representing the State of Indiana is Ryan Mueller, Division of Water Director for the Indiana Department of Natural Resources.

With the exception of Mueller, all members were appointed by the county commissioners in their respective areas. Through authority granted by the General Assembly, the Commission also invited two, non-voting representatives of Illinois counties along the Kankakee River to join the body in advisory roles.

“You might be able to come up with a group as good, but you could not name a commission stronger than this one,” said the Commission’s Executive Director, Scott Pelath. “Each member possesses significant expertise regarding the history and distinct challenges of the Kankakee and Yellow Rivers. Their mix of technical skills, lengthy practical experience, and academic knowledge is remarkable.”

Following record flooding in 2018, the Indiana legislature responded by empowering a streamlined commission with long-term funding for flood control, erosion mitigation, and economic and natural resource development. The Kankakee and Yellow River Basins are home to some of the world’s most productive farmland, historic communities, and tens of thousands of Indiana residents. Demonstrated increases in flood events have cost the state and local communities millions in repairs, emergency responses, economic disruption, and threats to regional revenue bases.

While establishing the framework of its long-term operations, the Commission adopted as its mission statement, “The Kankakee River Basin and Yellow River Basin Development Commission advances Northwest Indiana’s safety, economic prosperity, and quality of its natural resources.”

Likewise, the Commission formally stated its vision as, “The Kankakee River Basin and Yellow River Basin Development Commission is building a region where its residents, farms, and communities prosper in concert with one of the nation’s most unique natural environments.”

In other business, the Commission established the functionality of its statutorily-defined Technical Advisory Committee. McNamara appointed LaPorte County Surveyor Anthony Hendricks to serve as committee chair, and Kim Peterson will represent Northwest Indiana's Soil and Water Conservation Districts. Also serving their respective counties on the key advisory panel will be Jasper County Surveyor Vince Urbano; Lake County resident Tom Larson; Marshall County Commissioner Mike Delp; Newton County Surveyor Chris Knochel; Porter County Surveyor Kevin Breitzke; St. Joseph County Construction Technician John Law; and Starke County farmer Dan Gumz.

The next meeting of the Commission is scheduled for Thursday, August 22 at 9:30 a.m. CST at a location to be determined. All meetings of the Commission and its Technical Advisory Committee are open to the public.

For further information regarding the Commission, please contact Executive Director Scott Pelath at (219) 210-1002, sdpelath@gmail.com, or kankakeeriverbasin@gmail.com.
