

A LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR ON COVID-19

Right now, our entire nation is fighting to persevere through the current COVID-19 public health crisis. At the same time, our Commission is striving to be part of the solution.

To the maximum extent under current health and safety guidelines, we are continuing both our work and our mission. While we may have to temporarily adapt our meeting formats and work procedures, we remain focused on addressing nearly a century of mounting water resource challenges in Northwest Indiana.

As we face possible economic disruptions in the coming months, the Commission views itself as an asset in a rapid economic recovery. We intend to continue with regular planning and work preparation to ensure that our efforts remain on track when usual conditions return.

I remain available to answer questions on our website or sdpelath@gmail.com. I will highly value your ideas and input throughout the times ahead.

Sincerely,



Scott D. Pelath
Executive Director
Kankakee River Basin and
Yellow River Basin



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State invests \$2.3 million in Kankakee, Yellow Rivers

The Indiana General Assembly appropriated \$2.3 million in state funding to the newly formed Kankakee River Basin and Yellow River Basin Development Commission. The legislature's action was the first step of broad initiative to tackle nearly a century of water management challenges in the Kankakee River Basin.

"Never before has the State of Indiana invested so much in the Kankakee and Yellow Rivers," said Commission Chairman and St. Joseph County Surveyor John McNamara. "We now can fulfill plans rather than merely make them."

The Kankakee River Basin in Northwest Indiana, which includes both the Kankakee and Yellow Rivers, was once the second-largest freshwater marsh in the United States. Over a century ago, the basin was drained to make way for over a million acres of Indiana agriculture and a number of thriving Northwest Indiana communities. However, the underlying topography and geology of the basin continues to cause widescale flooding, heavy erosion, and water management dilemmas throughout the region.

"Despite being only months old, the Basin Development Commission is aggressively moving to put state and local resources to work," said the Commission's Executive Director Scott Pelath. "I was pleased to report to state officials that our eye is on the long-term, but our energy is dedicated to immediate progress."

In his testimony to the legislature, Pelath described how the Commission plans for the state dollars, which include:

- **Removing thousands of fallen trees and logjams that directly impede river channels**
- **Redesigning the sediment-heavy Yellow River banks in Marshall and Starke Counties**
- **Converting a Commission-owned farm in Newton County to a flood storage area**
- **Assisting Jasper County's efforts to stabilize failing Kankakee River banks**
- **Preserving seven U.S. Geological Survey river gages and the vital data they provide**

"These tasks constitute the opening phases of years of work ahead," said Pelath. "Our problems are decades in the making, and not all solutions will come quickly. But some things we can start promptly, and we intend to do them. It is never too soon to start making a noticeable difference."

Commission Treasurer and Starke County Surveyor Bill Crase agreed. "We have planned for years, and now it is time to seek results," said Crase. "I am grateful that the long-term partnership of the State of Indiana and eight Northwest Indiana counties is making it possible."

Commission Launches New Website

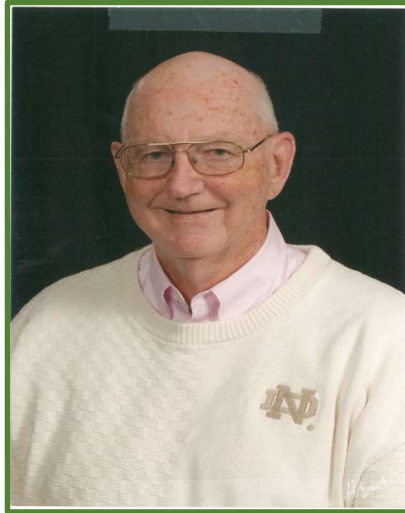
The Commission has launched a new website online at kankakeeandyellowrivers.org.

In an effort to ensure the most transparent, usable, and updated information, the website includes essential information such as:

- Minutes of all Commission meetings
- Technical Advisory Committee recommendations
- Policies and official records
- The Commission's 40-year work plan
- Links to information resources
- The latest river-related news and announcements
- Meeting information and locations
- Business and contractor opportunities
- Contact information
- Weather forecasts and USGS river gage data

The Commission continually updates the site and gladly accepts suggestions for improvements and additions.

Feedback can be given directly on the website's contact portal.



MEET INDIANA'S BASIN DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION MEMBERS

John McNamara
Chair
St. Joseph County Surveyor

The Kankakee River Basin and Yellow River Basin Development Commission consists of a nine-member board along with two advisory, non-voting members from the state of Illinois. A technical advisory committee also makes formal recommendations to Commission.

Eight Indiana counties are represented on the Commission: The county executives of Jasper, Lake, LaPorte, Marshall, Newton, Porter, St. Joseph, and Starke Counties each appoint a voting member to the panel for a fixed term. A representative of the Indiana Department of Natural Resources (DNR) also serves as a voting member.

By direction of the Indiana General Assembly, members are to be qualified in one of the following areas:

- Construction
- Project Management
- Flood Control
- Drainage
- Another similar professional background

COMMISSION MEMBERS



John McNamara, Chairman
St. Joseph County Surveyor



Bill Emerson, Vice Chairman
Lake County Surveyor



Michael Novotney, Secretary
Porter County Engineer



Bill Crase, Treasurer
Starke County Surveyor



Rob Churchill
Newton County Farmer



John Coulter, Sr.
LaPorte County Farmer



Craig Cultice
Marshall County Surveyor



Ryan Mueller
Director, Division of Water, Indiana Department of Natural Resources



James Walstra
Jasper County Commissioner

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Scott D. Pelath
Executive Director



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Who started the Kankakee River Basin and Yellow River Basin Development Commission?

The Indiana General Assembly passed legislation to form the Commission in 2019. Once Gov. Eric Holcomb signed the measure into law, the Commission came into being on July 1, 2019.

What are the powers and duties of the Commission?

Indiana Code 14-13-9-18 gives the Commission the ability to conduct 1) bank stabilization; 2) tree removal; 3) the construction and operation of sand traps; 4) channel reconstruction; 5) sediment removal; 6) acquisition, construction, and maintenance of access roads to levees and the channel of each river; and 7) other flood control actions considered necessary. The Commission may acquire interests in land, including easements, for the commission's use in providing flood storage and constructing levees or other flood control improvements. Any acquisitions are completely voluntary on the seller's part. The law also grants the Commission an exclusive, 75-foot easement from the top of each bank of the Kankakee and Yellow Rivers to conduct flood control and sediment management activities.

Does the Commission have a long-term plan to address flooding and erosion?

Yes. In September 2019, the Commission adopted a 40-year plan to address over a century of mounting flood and erosion problems. The state of Indiana funded the plan's development, and our neighbors in Illinois contributed to a share of the total cost. The full document is available for review at kankakeeandyellowrivers.org.

How are we paying for flood control and sediment management projects?

In 2019, the state of Indiana contributed \$2.3 million to begin work. After May 2021, capital projects will be funded by a limited annual assessment of properties within the Kankakee and Yellow River Basins. Under Indiana Code 14-13-9-21, these assessments are listed as \$7 per residential parcel; \$1 per farm acre; \$2 per undeveloped commercial acre; \$50 per commercial parcel; and \$360 per industrial or utility parcel. Funds may only be used for capital investments, and Indiana workers and businesses are granted preferences for the work.

Counties may choose to enact funding of their own as a substitute for these assessments. Otherwise, the amounts go into effect during the middle of next year.

STATE LINE BRIDGE FREED OF HEAVY DEBRIS

One of the Commission's first efforts was to free the Indiana-Illinois State Line Bridge of a severe logjam. Blocking nearly half the Kankakee River with logs, sediment, and rooted vegetation, it was a chokepoint for all water leaving Indiana through the Kankakee River.

Through the employment of amphibious excavator technology, the bridge remains clear of a major safety hazard and streamflow obstruction.



State Line Bridge, September 2019



State Line Bridge, February 2020

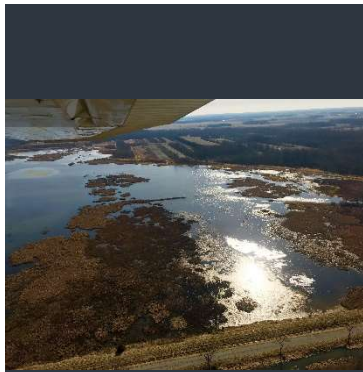
MISSION

The Kankakee River Basin and Yellow River Basin Development Commission advances Northwest Indiana's safety, economic prosperity, and quality of its natural resources.

VISION

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.





DID YOU KNOW?

The Kankakee River Basin once was home to the second-largest freshwater marsh in the United States. A century ago, major Indiana drainage efforts converted the marsh into valuable farmland and historic communities. However, the underlying geology, topography, and glacial sediment continue to affect the region in which we live.

KANKAKEE RIVER BASIN: AN OVERVIEW

- The Kankakee River Basin consists of areas that drain to the Kankakee River and its major tributary, the Yellow River.
- In Indiana alone, the basin covers about 1.3 *million* acres, of which 1.1 million acres are cropland.
- A measurable increase in major precipitation events, relentless sediment erosion, and an inefficient use of flood control assets have made the Kankakee and Yellow River channels increasingly difficult to manage.
- The trend in increased frequency of heavy precipitation is predicted to continue, suggesting that a new management strategy for economic vitality, sustainable agriculture, and our natural resources is necessary.
- As flooding continues to increase in frequency and magnitude, economic costs will also increase.

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