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### **BASIN DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION REFLECTS ON FIRST FULL YEAR; LOOKS AHEAD**

LAPORTE — When the Indiana legislature formed the Kankakee River Basin and Yellow River Basin Development Commission in 2019, most observers agreed its mission was demanding.

Since the state straightened and deepened the Kankakee River over a century ago, water management dilemmas and major flood events throughout Northwest Indiana continued to mount. Long-term solutions became essential and unavoidable.

“At the time, I made clear it would take a lot longer than a year to fix a hundred years,” said Basin Development Commission Executive Director Scott Pelath. “That also meant that not another day could go by without taking action.”

Last year, the Commission adopted a forty-year work plan to control flooding and sediment erosion within the Kankakee River Basin, which includes major portions of eight Northwest Indiana counties. Among the priorities were reconstructing the sediment-laden banks of the Yellow River; strengthening the banks of the Kankakee River; minimizing obstructions; and reconnecting channels to parts of the floodplain that can manageably hold water. For its scope and long-term vision, the Indiana Association for Floodplain and Stormwater Management recently granted the plan its Outstanding Floodplain Project Award for 2020.

However, Pelath was quick to point out that as with any plan, new challenges inevitably present themselves.

“Our plan recognizes that emergencies and unforeseen events will happen, and we have to tackle those, too,” said Pelath. “Shaping the future and meeting the moment are tasks along the same path.”

Commission Chairman and St. Joseph County Surveyor John McNamara agreed.

“We regularly have tough decisions to make, but it’s major progress that we now get to make them,” said McNamara. “The legislature granted tools that will make a difference in the years and decades ahead.”

Through the assistance of \$2.3 million in state funding, the Commission has completed or initiated the following work during 2020:

- Initiated the redesign and reconstruction of 1.5 miles of Yellow River bank in Marshall and Starke Counties
- Cleared and prevented severe logjams in the upper basin
- Repaired breached and failing river banks
- Commenced the transition of a 200-acre Newton County property into a floodwater storage area
- Cleared major, accumulated obstructions at downstream bridges

- Contributed local funding for several miles of federally-approved bank repair in Jasper County
- Funded a logjam management pilot program in Porter County
- Approved a streambank stabilization project in Lake County

“We have made great strides in a year, but we have years of work ahead,” said Commission Treasurer and Starke County Surveyor Bill Crase. “Some results will be immediate. Others will be realized when we look back over a number of years. What matters most is continual progress.”

For further information regarding the Commission, please contact Executive Director Scott Pelath at [sdpelath@gmail.com](mailto:sdpelath@gmail.com), [kankakeeriverbasin@gmail.com](mailto:kankakeeriverbasin@gmail.com), or (219) 861-7999.

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