



**MINUTES OF THE KANKAKEE RIVER BASIN AND YELLOW RIVER BASIN  
DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION**

***\*\*\*KRB-YRBDC Technical Advisory Committee\*\*\****

**Thursday, June 25, 2020**

**3:00 p.m. CDT/4:00 p.m. EDT**

**Conducted Electronically Under Executive Order 20-09**

Tony Hendricks, Chair, called the meeting to order at 3:00 p.m.

Executive Director Scott Pelath explained the electronic meeting rules and courtesies.

Mr. Pelath called the roll.

*Members Present*

Kevin Breitzke	Dan Gumz	Tony Hendricks	Chris Knochel
Tom Larson	John Law	Kim Peterson	Vince Urbano

*Staff Present*

Scott Pelath

The chair determined that a quorum was present to conduct business.

**APPROVAL OF FEBRUARY 1 MINUTES**

*Kevin Breitzke moved to approve the February 1, 2020 minutes. Vince Urbano seconded the motion.*

**MOTION ADOPTED BY VOICE VOTE.**

## **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT**

Mr. Pelath reported on some matters not referenced in the agenda.

He stated that state revenues are reduced due to economic commissions, and state agencies have been asked to keep dollars in reserve. Mr. Pelath indicated that he submitted a finance plan to the State Budget Agency. While he was confident that the Commission could continue major initiatives, he said restraints on the rate of expenditures were in order.

Mr. Pelath also announced that he submitted an application to the Corps of Engineers to clarify the guidelines of logjam management in the years ahead. He is in the process of responding to reasonable public comment.

He also conveyed that the river bank had breached upstream of the Dehaan Ditch in Newton County, and emergency repairs were in order. He noted that access issues were daunting, but hoped work would begin after July 4. However, he reported that there are long-term storage opportunities on the affected property, and the matter presents an opportunity as well as a challenge.

Finally, Mr. Pelath mentioned that endangered bat population surveys along two stretches of the Kankakee River were in progress.

## **OLD BUSINESS**

### **Thayer Farm Transition [ATTACHMENT 1]**

Mr. Pelath introduced Zack DeYoung, manager of the LaSalle Fish and Wildlife Area, to share his tentative plans for the transition of the Thayer Farm to a floodwater storage area. Mr. Pelath shared his view that the property possesses significant flood storage potential even without additional improvements to the property. He also expressed some skepticism that investments in physical upgrades would yield a commensurate increase in flood storage value. Mr. Pelath stated his goal was to ensure that the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) felt comfortable moving ahead with floodplain reconnection at the site.

Mr. DeYoung said the goal was to adjoin the property to the adjacent Ellicott Property. He has reached out to Ducks Unlimited for the design of control structures and constructed breaches. He simply would like formal sanction from the Commission to move forward with plans.

Mr. Pelath's judgment was that the \$100,000 budgeted for Thayer Farm transition likely is unnecessary at that level, but would like for DNR to move ahead with its piece due to the potential upside value.

Chris Knochel agreed that an investment in reinforcing the berm near the road provides little value toward addressing in overflow from the ditch outside the Commission's jurisdiction. He did urge that the property be kept in agricultural condition until changes are complete.

Mr. Breitzke urged that Mr. Pelath work with Mark Wunderink to ensure the land remains farmable in the near term. Mr. Pelath agreed, and said he was moving forward with property maintenance.

Kim Peterson asked if Mr. Wunderink would continue to pump. Mr. Pelath said that would be at Mark's discretion for maintenance needs.

Dan Gumz asked if there were any liability issues related to the county road if it is affected. Mr. Knochel said historically, the county highway department has maintained the levy next to the road. He believed an arrangement could be coordinated if any problems emerged.

Mr. Gumz also asked if there were any risks related to the Ellicott property. Mr. DeYoung said the overall design will include inflow and outflow management between the two properties.

The chair asked if it was in fact the plan that little was needed beyond the construction of the breaches. Mr. Pelath responded that the priority was that the DNR move ahead with design of the planned breaches notwithstanding any other improvements. His view was that the DNR should not have to wait on anything further the Commission may or may not do with the property.

*Tom Larson moved that it be recommended to the Commission that the DNR be allowed to move ahead with its plans, and that the property be kept in agricultural condition this year. Mr. Breitzke seconded.*

MOTION ADOPTED BY VOICE VOTE.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

### **Grand Marsh Park Streambank Restoration in Lake County [ATTACHMENT 2]**

The chair recognized Commission member Bill Emerson regarding the designed repair of a section of bank and Grand Kankakee Marsh County Park in Lake County. He stated that it fits within the Commission's work plan, and seeks Commission approval for the project.

Mr. Emerson believes that the project will improve stability and access, and will help develop the park for floodplain reconnection in the future.

Mr. Pelath displayed the map of the project and the area within the work plan. He said the area already is envisioned as a floodwater storage area, and maintaining the bank stability will benefit the long-term plans for the area. He also mentioned the sediment control benefits.

Mr. Breitzke asked how many trees needed to be removed. Mr. Emerson believed that access from Clay Street is good until one gets to the project site. Mr. Breitzke asked what kind of water control would be put in place. Mr. Emerson said the project is only for the bank repair, and such decisions would come next. Mr. Breitzke asked that the shape of future water control structures be considered in the future.

Mr. Pelath emphasized that the bank reinforcement is necessary to save the ability to install water control structures at a later time.

Mr. Gumz asked about potential cost. Mr. Emerson said that tentatively, he would request a set-aside of \$300,000.

*Mr. Breitzke moved that the project be recommended favorably to the Commission. Vince Urbano seconded the motion.*

MOTION ADOPTED BY VOICE VOTE.

### **Presentation from Jim Deardorff, Porter County resident and neighbor of River's Edge Farm**

Jim Deardorff presented photos of the condition on his property after the 2018 flood. His property is immediately adjacent to a commission property, and is protected by a dyke on the Commission's property. The photos showed significant amounts of water and leftover crop residue that took several weeks to remove.

Mr. Deardorff said the Commission had built up the dyke in the recent past, but it continues to have a significant low spot.

Mr. Deardorff asked that the Commission consider raising the level of the dyke.

Mr. Pelath said the matter was before the Committee because in this case, the Commission is a neighbor. He also sought input from the Committee regarding an appropriate path forward.

Mr. Breitzke suggested some solutions for the crop residue, including the presence of a cover crop. He also made a point that Mr. Deardorff's property is an existing flood hazard area.

Mr. Deardorff said his belief was that the dyke was put in place to protect his house, and it has not served its purpose. Despite past efforts to improve it, he maintained it is still low.

Mr. Breitzke indicated that he and his office would reevaluate the height of the berm and potential solutions.

Mr. Knochel asked how the property fit into the plan. Mr. Pelath said there was some potential for plan integration, but would require further assessment.

### **Solicitation of county proposals for upcoming meetings**

The chair urged that counties continue to bring work and projects to the Committee.

The chair said the LaPorte and Starke Counties hoped to maintain several sediment traps once logjam management work is completed.

Mr. Gumz said it would be beneficial to remove sediment from two existing traps on the Yellow River.

Commission member Bill Crase conveyed that he hoped to remove invasive plant species from areas where logjam management is occurring.

### **OTHER BUSINESS**

Mr. Pelath emphasized that that in the aggregate, only a small percentage of trees are slated for removal. He also stated that the Commission intends to mitigate trees by replanting and reintroducing locally native and bank stabilizing species. The chair concurred, and urged that areas be reforested in a manner beneficial to the channels.

Mr. Breitzke urged that new trees be planted on the landward sides of banks. The chair strongly agreed with Mr. Breitzke.

Mr. Crase said that trees being on the landward side was a recommendation of the Corps of Engineers.

Mr. Breitzke said that in consideration of new projects, that the Committee and Commission remain mindful of work already approved.

Mr. Pelath added that when the Committee technically recommends proposals, it allows the Commission to focus more on funding and cashflow management.

Kim Peterson asked about clearing the abandoned railroad bridge at Schneider. Mr. Pelath said he intended to evaluate the condition.

#### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

None

#### **NEXT MEETING**

To be determined.

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

The Committee and assembled guests fully dispersed at approximately 4:18 p.m. CST.

## ATTACHMENT 1

### DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 2-2020

To: Kankakee River Basin and Yellow River Basin Development Commission  
From: Technical Advisory Committee  
Subject: Thayer Farm Transition  
Date: June 25, 2020

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**DESCRIPTION:** In 2019, the Commission made the policy decision to transition its Thayer Farm from agricultural production to floodwater storage. The Committee and the Commission have evaluated possible changes to the property's physical structure in order to 1) maximize possible flood storage volumes; 2) ensure that the property management is coordinated with natural resource restoration at the adjacent Gus Ellicott property; and 3) protect the road at the southern boundary of the parcel.

Likewise, the Commission already has decided to allow the Indiana Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to control the flow of water in and out of the Thayer Farm under its management.

The costs of further structural changes to the Thayer Farm against the additional floodwater storage benefits are ambiguous. The property as currently comprised is already a floodwater storage asset, and its ability to hold water irrespective of additional physical alterations is of value to the Commission and its mission.

**LOCATION:** Thayer, Newton County, Indiana

**ISSUE:** The Committee and the Commission have discussed possible physical improvements to the Thayer Farm such as 1) improving the berm along West 1200 North in Newton County; 2) scrapes; 3) bank relocation; 4) plantings; and 5) ditch maintenance. It is not yet clear if any of these solutions will provide a tangible or significant additional flood control benefit in return for the expected costs.

The Committee does agree that 1) placing the property under DNR management; and 2) allowing the Department to install water control structures to permit the orderly ingress of water at high river levels is of benefit to the entire basin.

**RECOMMENDATION:** The Committee recommends that the Commission permit and encourage the DNR to move forward with the installation of water control structures on the bank. It also particularly recommends that such structures allow the Thayer Farm to maximize the water it can safely and effectively retain during flood events and high river gage levels. Finally, it recommends that the Department be allowed to move forward with such plans regardless of any further permitted investments that the Commission may make in the berm or other flood control characteristics of the property.

## ATTACHMENT 2

### DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 3-2020

To: Kankakee River Basin and Yellow River Basin Development Commission  
From: Technical Advisory Committee  
Subject: Bank Stabilization at Grand Marsh Park in Lake County  
Date: June 25, 2020

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**DESCRIPTION:** Lake County has developed plans to stabilize the bank at Grand Marsh Park. Aside from the need to clear and repair a failing bank, the project would preserve access and bank integrity for the purpose of the area holding additional floodwaters in the future.

The project scope and location are contained in the attached plans and specifications prepared for the Lake County Drainage Board.

**LOCATION:** Lake County, Indiana

**ISSUE:** The Committee reviewed the project to determine if it had significant value within the Commission's mission and work plan.

**RECOMMENDATION:** The Committee recommends that the Commission consider funding the project. Its goal of streambank stabilization is fully consistent with the Commission's work plan and long-range efforts. Furthermore, the project, if completed, will preserve further future opportunities to create flood storage and enhance setback flood protection in the vicinity.