

EXECUTIVE
DIRECTOR'S
LETTER ON
LONG-TERM
FUNDING

Northwest Indiana officially is making long-term investments in the Kankakee River Basin.

Starting this month, direct contributions from counties and assessments of properties within the watershed will fund work to better manage our region's water resources.

The simple fact is that we live on what used to be the nation's second largest freshwater marsh. Our forerunners dredged and straightened the Kankakee River over a century ago, and we now have a new opportunity to build on successes and mitigate unintended outcomes. While no one enjoys an extra fee, we can also choose to look at it as an overdue reinvestment in our area's future.

There were consequences -- both positive and negative -- arising from the Kankakee Basin's unique history. The goal now is to amplify what already works while modernizing our approaches to water management.

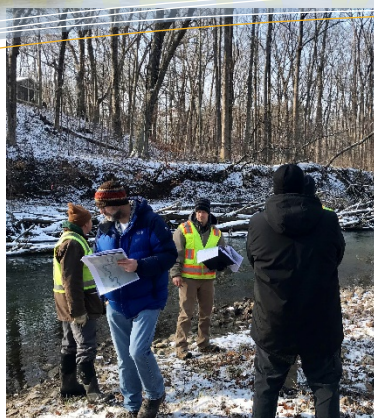
Our shared goal is to preserve and improve the economic and natural development of our region. At the end, it is about making our lives better.

I remain available to answer questions on our website or at sdpelath@gmail.com. I highly value questions, new ideas, and input.

Sincerely,



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



Agencies provide consultation at Yellow River project site.

this issue

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Yellow River Improvements Nearing Commencement

In 2019, the Basin Development Commission adopted a forty-year work plan to address nearly a century of increasing flooding in the Kankakee River Basin. Among a number of goals, a primary objective is to reduce channel-clogging sediment originating from the Yellow River.

"When Indiana dredged and straightened the Kankakee River over a hundred year ago, one effect was to increase the water velocity of the Yellow River," said Basin Development Commission Executive Director Scott Pelath. "Because the Yellow runs through glacial sand deposits, faster water means more sand being carried downstream. Reversing this trend in the years ahead is essential for improving streamflow, bank safety, and water quality."

Last year, the commission selected Cardno, headquartered in Walkerton, Indiana, to design the first of five phases of the planned reconstruction beginning upstream of the Marshall-Starke County Line. The design's goals include:

- **Reducing the grade of steep and collapsing banks**
- **Stabilizing banks with stone, wood, and native vegetation**
- **Increasing the water flow capacity of the Yellow River channel**
- **Minimizing the entrance of heavy sediment into the waterway**

"The commission and its advisors offered substantial input on the design and construction details," said commission member and Marshall County Surveyor Craig Cultice. "The long-term project goals are valuable, not only for Marshall and Starke Counties, but for this entire region of Indiana. I'm honored to be a charter member of the Basin Development Commission and to be Marshall County's representative for this historic endeavor."

Starke County farmer and commission advisory committee member Dan Gumz echoed the importance of reducing sediment to the agricultural sector.

"Every year, our drainage system is clogged with more and more sediment," said Gumz. "Our farming communities cannot maintain economic success without addressing this problem head-on. Agriculture and its contributions to our region rely on effective water management, and improvements to the Yellow River are a key to sustaining a central feature of our economy."

Upon final construction permits being issued by federal and state regulatory agencies, the commission then intends to proceed to the first construction phase in Marshall County. The Indiana Department of Environmental Management already has issued its water quality certification for the project. Work remains scheduled to commence this fall.

Kankakee River Basin Stream Gages in Indiana

The Commission, local units of government, and our region's citizens cannot plan and manage water resources without vital data from the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS).

More importantly, the National Weather Service uses this information to predict flood conditions throughout our area.

USGS gages currently are placed at eight locations: Shelby; Kouts; Dunn's Bridge; and Davis on the Kankakee River; and Plymouth; Oak Grove; Knox; and Brems on the Yellow River.

The Commission funds five of these gages directly, the Indiana Department of Environmental Management funds Shelby, and NIPSCO provides dollars for Kouts and Dunn's Bridge. USGS provides supplemental funding for all devices.

USGS stream gage data for Indiana can be found at <https://waterdata.usgs.gov/in/nwis>.



Sample USGS gage height data

Recent Commission Projects -- Completed, Ongoing, and On-Tap

- Oversaw redesign of 1.3 miles of Yellow River banks in Marshall and Starke Counties; construction slated for Fall 2021
- Clearing and preventing severe logjams on both the Kankakee and Yellow Rivers
- Commencing bank reconstruction at Grand Kankakee Marsh County Park in Lake County in June 2021
- In partnership with Indiana DNR, transitioning 200-acre Newton County property into a floodwater storage area
- Clearing major, accumulated obstructions at downstream bridges, particularly State Line Bridge
- Contributing local funding shares for several miles of federally-approved bank repair in Jasper County
- Expanding riverbank access in Porter County
- Initiating reseeding of select riverbank locations with locally native grasses
- Partnering with Marshall County SWCD for riverbank reconstruction in Bremen

THIS EDITION'S FEATURED STAKEHOLDER

Peg Kohring
Senior Associate
The Conservation Fund



The Commission directly benefits from a team of experienced and committed professionals within the Midwest's conservation sector.

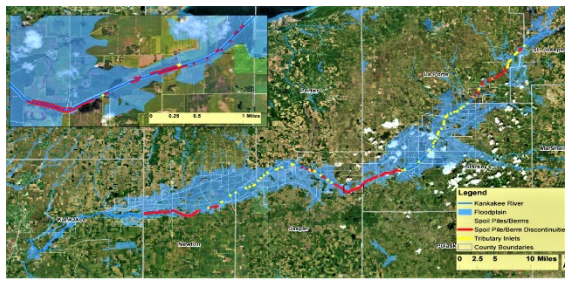
Margaret A. "Peg" Kohring, a Senior Associate with The Conservation Fund, is simply indispensable in her lifelong commitment to the enhancement of natural resources.

An essential component of the Commission's long-term work plan is the careful connection of our rivers to their historic floodplains. For the benefit of our regional economic prosperity, the aim is to create areas that can safely and manageably absorb floodwaters during major weather events.

Peg routinely assists with the development of the Kankakee and Yellow River floodplains. She reaches out to interested property owners. She brings fellow stakeholders from her vast network to join discussions of our work plan. To assist in communications, she even developed a database of properties along both river channels.

Peg has 44 years expertise in nonprofit management, land protection, and stewardship. Peg holds an M.S. in Botany and a B.S. in Natural Resource Management from Michigan State University. She also is the co-author of a book, *Selling and Transferring Land and Conservation Easements*.

The Commission remains deeply grateful for Peg's leadership, expertise, and support.



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 are used for capital improvements, and Indiana workers and businesses are granted preferences for the work.

At any time, counties may choose to enact funding of their own as a substitute for these assessments. Otherwise, the amounts in state law took effect in January 2021.

FLOODWATER STORAGE PRIORITIES ADOPTED

Manageable reconnection of the Kankakee and Yellow Rivers to their floodplains is a recommended action in all forty-years of the Kankakee River Flood and Sediment Management Work Plan.

The work plan recommends scores of potential floodplain reconnections along both channels. However, the achievability of a specific reconnections is influenced by factors such as 1) landowner consent; 2) construction and acquisition costs; 3) need for new flood control structures; 4) permits and approvals; 5) grants of easements; 6) viable access; and 7) mitigation costs and requirements.

RANKING	LANDOWNER	CONTROL STRUCTURE	ZERO ACQUISITION	EXISTING SETBACK	PUBLIC LAND	NRCS EASEMENT
	CONSENT	IN WORK PLAN	COST	PROTECTION		ABSENT
1	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
2	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N
3	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y
4	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N
5	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y
6	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	N
7	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y
8	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N
9	Y	Y	N	Y	N	Y
10	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N
11	Y	Y	N	N	N	Y
12	Y	Y	N	N	N	N
13	Y	N	N	N	N	Y
14	Y	N	N	N	N	N
NOT CONSIDERED	N	N	N	N	N	N

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?

Indiana shares the Kankakee River with Illinois, where it joins the Des Plaines River to form the Illinois River. The Kankakee River Basin drains 2,989 square miles in Northwest Indiana, 2,169 square miles in Northeast Illinois, and about seven square miles in Southwest Lower Michigan.

KANKAKEE RIVER BASIN: AN OVERVIEW

- The Kankakee River Basin in Indiana consists of areas that drain to the Kankakee River and its major tributary, the Yellow River.
- Prior to the 20th Century, the Grand Kankakee Marsh was once the second-largest freshwater marsh in the United States.
- 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.
- 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.

