

RECOMMENDATION 8-2021

To: Kankakee River Basin and Yellow River Basin Development Commission
From: Technical Advisory Committee (TAC)
Subject: Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)
Date: September 10, 2021

DESCRIPTION: The Indiana Department of Agriculture (“the Department”) intends to apply for Regional Conservation Partnership (RCPP) funding through the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). With up to \$20 million in federal funding, the Department intends to lead a regional conservation effort focused through various soil health and water management practices. According to the Department, approximately 70-percent of the funding will be targeted at landowner programs and incentives.

The partnership’s goals are to mitigate excess water, to improve water quality, and build community involvement in the conservation and wise use of natural resources.

LOCATION: The Kankakee River Basin in Indiana excluding the Iroquois River Basin

ISSUES: Federal funding under RCPP requires a match of state in-kind and cash contributions. The level of match commitments directly affects the amount of federal dollars available for RCPP programming in the Kankakee watershed.

The Commission already has committed its planned Yellow River streambank reconstruction as in-kind match for federal RCPP conservation dollars. The value of the work for Fiscal Years 2022 and 2023 exceeds \$2 million.

Jennifer Thum, a senior Department official, publicly requested that the Technical Advisory Committee recommend additional, in-kind matches of \$1 million in annual Yellow River work in Fiscal Years 2024, 2025, and 2026. She reported that the additional matches would substantially increase the NRCS’s level of investment throughout the region.

The Commission’s Executive Director noted that while Yellow River reconstruction is a top Commission priority, specific amounts of match have not yet been designated or permitted beyond Calendar Year 2022. The Director also expressed that the Commission was unlikely to consider direct cash matches, and that consideration must be given to contingencies, emergencies, and unforeseen demands on resources.

The Department has assured that in-kind pledges are not expected to be exact, and variations between in-kind pledges and actual in-kind expenditures are typical.

RECOMMENDATION: The Technical Advisory Committee recognizes the value of the planned RCPP for the Kankakee River Basin, supports its goals, and in particular lauds its potential to reduce sediment entering the Kankakee and Yellow Rivers. The Committee also acknowledges the vital importance the State of Indiana’s support of the Commission’s mission.

The Committee recommends that the value of any Commission work performed on the Yellow River through Fiscal Year 2026 be pledged as in-kind match for the RCPP. The Committee also recommends that planned water quality projects like bank hydroseeding also be contributed as in-kind match.

However, given the concurrent priorities within the Commission's work plan, the Committee also recommends that:

- 1) The value of in-kind match for the RCPP not exceed \$1 million in any given year;
- 2) Pledges should include only in-kind contributions of work funded by the Commission; and
- 3) The Commission stipulate to the Department that an in-kind pledge in any given year may be reduced for unavoidable reasons such as:
 - a. flood emergencies;
 - b. repair of breaches or impending breaches;
 - c. reduction of the scope of Yellow River projects due to labor and construction costs;
 - d. rejections or delays of regulatory permits from IDEM, DNR, or USACE;
 - e. statutory changes affecting the Commission; and
 - f. interruptions or delays in the Commission's expected revenue.

ADOPTED BY COMMITTEE 9/10/2021