

## RIVER NEWS

EXECUTIVE  
DIRECTOR'S  
LETTER ON  
STRATEGIC PLAN

Since the General Assembly first formed the Commission in 2019, our multi-county panel immediately began addressing over a century of mounting flood management issues. I am pleased that the Commission continues to pursue its economic mission with action.

The Commission's forty-year work plan for the Kankakee and Yellow Rivers includes several key strategic components:

- 1) Reduce the transportation of channel-clogging sediment downstream;
- 2) Remove barriers and impediments to the flow of water;
- 3) Stabilize and repair eroding and failing river banks; and
- 4) Improve and develop manageable floodwater storage areas.

Challenges in the Kankakee River Basin did not arise in a year, and it will take more than a year to address them. However, the Commission already is completing vital improvements with a dedicated sense of commitment.

I remain available to answer questions on our website or at [sdpelath@gmail.com](mailto:sdpelath@gmail.com). Questions, ideas, and thoughtful input are always welcome.

Sincerely,



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



*Completed Marshall County Section of bank reconstruction, December 2, 2021.*

## this issue

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## Yellow River Project Finishes On-Time, Under-Budget

The opening phase of the Kankakee River Basin and Yellow River Basin Development Commission's quest to reduce relentless sediment originating from the Yellow River is now complete. The long-term work to stabilize severely eroding Yellow River banks now moves to the pre-construction phase of next year's efforts in Starke County.

"I am proud this long-term work started right here in Marshall County," said Commission member and Marshall County Surveyor Craig Cultice. "I am even more pleased that Marshall County could lead an effort that is intended to benefit our entire region."

The reduction of transported sediment is a top priority within the Commission's long-term flood mitigation mission. Over decades, the straightening of the Kankakee River before World War I increased water velocities and accelerated bank erosion. Sediment deposited downstream raises the difficulty of limiting future flood events.

"To see a half-mile of sliding river banks transformed into a resilient waterway is remarkable," said Commission Executive Director Scott Pelath. "With cascading sand banks approaching fifty-feet in height, we were certain the task was difficult. We now know the results exceeded our best expectations."

Through the design and construction work of Cardno in Walkerton and The Stanger Group in Goshen, the Commission oversaw a long-term plan to reduce steep bank grades, employ a combination of rock and on-site wood resources to direct streamflow away from vulnerable banks, and plant native grasses for persistent erosion control. When implemented over a number of miles, the effort is intended to reduce sediment that later settles downstream in the Kankakee and Yellow Rivers.

"A project like this is an investment in a lasting asset," said Cultice. "While much work remains to be done, the value of this section will continue to carry forward in decades to come."

Pelath noted that thanks to favorable weather conditions throughout the project's first month, the overall project cost stayed beneath its original budget of \$700,000. Next year the work will extend into Starke County.

"We identified a number of useful efficiencies from this project to be applied to future, similar projects," said Pelath. "I am grateful that in 2019, the Indiana legislature granted the tools to make substantive and responsible improvements in the Kankakee and Yellow Rivers."

## Commission Innovates Logjam Management; Seeding Techniques

One daunting challenge for the Commission is how to perform vital work where access to the channel is costly, unsafe, or infeasible.

This year, the Commission implemented innovative approaches for removing woody debris, restoring streamflow, and stabilizing bank erosion with native grasses.

Using a concept developed by Porter County Stormwater Management, a two-barge team removed over 600 logs from the channel through only a single access point. Likewise, in partnership with the Marshall County Drainage Board, saw-teams cut the centers of Yellow River logjams where access was limited by dense, forested wetland. In both cases, barriers to the flow of water were reduced without expensive impacts to adjacent areas.

Badly eroding banks benefit from stabilizing native grasses. This fall, the Commission hydroseeded over five-miles of bank with erosion-control vegetation such as wildrye, switchgrass, and oats. However, unlike traditional seeding operations, the seed was delivered from a boat. Due to vastly superior visibility, this method helped conserve material while targeting seed where it was most needed.

Not every problem demands a novel solution. But challenges inspire new ideas to be tested, refined, and shared.



*Porter County Stormwater Management  
Barge Pilot Method*



*Saw-Team Opening in Logjam, Yellow River.*

## COMMISSION MEMBER WELCOME

**Dick Welsh**  
Agribusiness Leader  
LaPorte County



In July, the Commission enthusiastically welcomed longtime LaPorte County Agribusiness Leader Dick Welsh to the Commission.

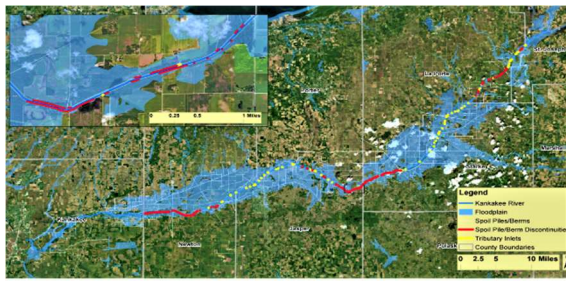
While Dick might be new to the Commission, he is anything but new to the people of LaPorte County. In fact, he is widely regarded as somewhat of an institution within our region's agricultural sector. With over five decades of agribusiness success, Dick's advice and expertise is routinely sought by local organizations, fellow farmers, and policymakers throughout all levels of the public sector.

Dick's knowledge of the agricultural history and evolution of the upper Kankakee watershed is expansive. Even more, he is a strong advocate for agriculture, its current and future needs, and its foundational place within our state and regional economy.

In less than six months, Dick already has helped secure additional funds for upstream logjam management, led the replacement of an essential water control structure, and personally identified an array of achievable improvements.

With the addition of one Indiana Department of Natural Resources representative, Basin Development Commission members are appointed to four-year terms by the County Commissioners in their respective counties. We are grateful Dick has agreed to serve.





## 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](http://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.

## 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.*



## DRONE FOOTAGE AVAILABLE ON WEBSITE

Over the past year, Marshall County Surveyor Craig Cultice, our friends at Porter County Stormwater Management, and Indiana DNR have generously supported the Commission with their drone assets.

For those who take an interest in project development or might simply enjoy an aerial view of local features, we routinely post drone footage on the Commission's website at [kankakeeandyellowrivers.org](http://kankakeeandyellowrivers.org).

News, meeting times, minutes, and general information about the Kankakee River Basin are also available.



*Yellow River footage available at our website, [kankakeeandyellowrivers.org](http://kankakeeandyellowrivers.org).*



## DID YOU KNOW?

Running from South Bend to its confluence with the Des Plaines River in Illinois, the Kankakee River currently runs 133 miles. The river once was nearly 240 miles-long prior to its straightening over a century ago. Many of the river's former meanders remain plainly visible from the air.

## 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 20<sup>th</sup> 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.
- Precipitation volatility is predicted to continue, suggesting that a new management strategy for economic vitality, sustainable agriculture, and our natural resources is necessary.
- Investments in the Kankakee River Basin are intended to reduce the future costs resulting from flood frequency and magnitude.

