

**EXECUTIVE
DIRECTOR'S
LETTER ON
LOGJAM
MANAGEMENT**

A frequent reaction to the Commission's larger projects is "Wow!" Striking transformations tend to get more ink.

Less obvious – but every bit as important – is the Commission's continual work to eliminate logjams and obstructions to the flow of water in the Kankakee and Yellow Rivers. Logjam management is a primary task in every year of the Commission's work plan.

This past year, the Commission routinely removed obstructions from major bridges such as State Line Bridge and antiquated railroad overpasses. Teams removed fallen trees on the Kankakee River between US 6 and IN-104 in LaPorte County and downstream of Clay Street in Lake County. The amphibious excavator opened major jams between IN-55 and US 41.

On the Yellow River, contractors removed fallen trees between English Lake and Knox. In areas without channel access, workers opened numerous woody obstructions downstream of Plymouth.

The overall task is a mammoth one. However, sustained and dedicated efforts yield worthwhile outcomes over time.

I remain available to answer questions on our website or at 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 Phase I of Yellow River
reconstruction, December 15, 2022.*

PHASE ONE OF YELLOW RIVER IMPROVEMENTS COMPLETE

In December 2020, representatives of the Kankakee River Basin and Yellow River Basin Development Commission pitched their vision to reconstruct a section of the Yellow River to federal and state officials. Exactly two years later, that vision is now a lasting asset for Northwest Indiana.

For the second straight year, workers completed the nearly two-mile long project for less than was budgeted.

"Right out of the gate, the Commission tackled the Kankakee River Basin's major source of channel-clogging sediment," said Commission Executive Director Scott Pelath. "After just two work seasons, the complete transformation of one of the most highly degraded sections of the Yellow River is remarkable to observe. The investment will yield widespread dividends for years to come."

The current project began upstream of the Marshall County line in September 2021. Work resumed this spring immediately downstream in Starke County, where severe bank erosion was threatening vulnerable residents along the river. Project tasks included 1) reducing bank grades, 2) placing stone structures in the river to direct water away from vulnerable banks; 3) increasing channel capacity; 4) reinforcing banks with stone and onsite wood; and 5) reseeding banks with native erosion-control vegetation.

"This is the largest streambank project ever in Starke County, and one of the largest of this type anywhere," said Commission Secretary and Starke County resident Bill Crase. "The goal is simple. We need to cut down the amount of sediment entering our rivers. It is harder for rivers to hold water when they're filling up with sand."

Pelath emphasized that projects like these benefit the entire watershed.

"Carefully designed water projects have impacts far beyond their immediate locations," said Pelath. "Every grain of sand from the Yellow River is deposited somewhere downstream in the Kankakee River. When we reduce erosion and improve water quality, both upstream and downstream areas receive value in return."

The purposeful reduction of Yellow River sediment is a key facet of the Commission's forty-year work plan, which was adopted under state law. Another stretch of Yellow River reconstruction is planned for this year.

"We have years of work ahead of us," said Crase. "It took a century to get to this point. But the completion of Phase One is a key milestone."

Cardno, now Stantec, in Walkerton designed the Starke County project, and The Stanger Group from Goshen completed its construction.

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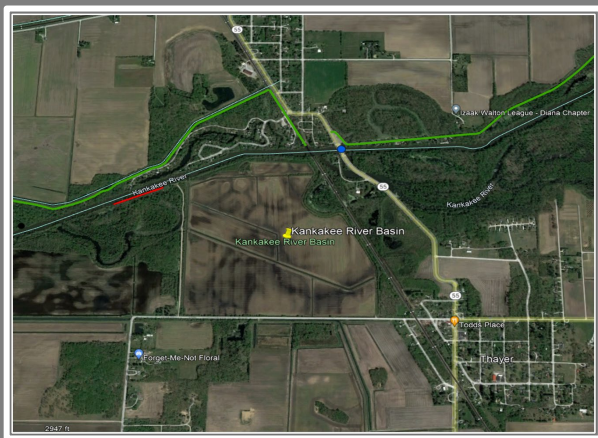
TEAMWORK WITH INDIANA DNR

In 2022, the Commission and the Indiana Department of Natural Resources (DNR) teamed-up on two major projects to better mitigate flooding during high water events.

Not long after its formation, the Commission designated its Thayer Farm in Newton County as a future floodwater storage area. This past August, DNR completed installation of a spillway to relieve pressure from the Kankakee River during flood events. Thanks to our partnership, when the Kankakee River reaches moderate flood stage, flood waters now will manageably enter the Thayer Farm and DNR's adjacent Blackberry Marsh. The properties together add over four hundred acres of controlled floodwater storage.

On the Yellow River, the Commission oversaw the restoration of a key spillway at DNR's Kankakee Fish and Wildlife Area. Originally constructed in the early 1980's, the structure no longer functioned as designed due to decades of accumulated sediment.

The Kankakee River Basin is home to a wide number of stakeholders and interests. Missions frequently overlap, and cooperation in such instances is essential for the greater good of our region.



Thayer Farm/Blackberry Marsh floodwater storage area, LaSalle Fish and Wildlife Area, Newton County.



Restored Yellow River spillway, Kankakee Fish and Wildlife Area, Starke County.

TEAM MEMBER PROFILE

John McNamara

Chair

Basin Development
Commission



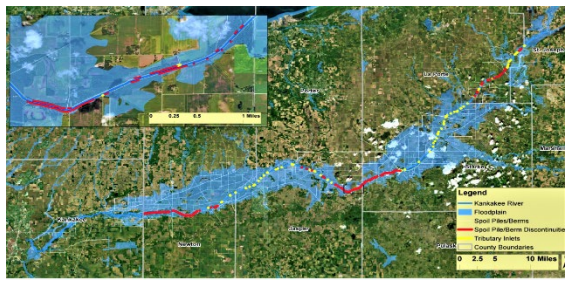
After fifty years, the Commission's very own Chairman John McNamara has retired as St. Joseph County Surveyor. No other surveyor in Indiana history has served so long.

A Professional Engineer and graduate of Notre Dame University, John first won the office of county surveyor in 1972. When he started, he inherited a countywide ditch maintenance fund of only \$5000. Decades later, he leaves behind a modern system of drainage management in one of the nation's premier agricultural counties.

John's retirement marks the end of an era, when county work was done without the benefit of high-speed computers, digital satellite imagery, and GPS data. Despite the advantages of modern technology, John transcended changes with plenty of smarts, common sense, and an ability to lead others in a common effort.

John was an original leader of the old Kankakee River Basin Commission when it formed in 1977. After the Indiana legislature formed our new commission in 2019, John returned to Kankakee River Basin leadership as our first chair. During a time of transition, his wisdom, experience, and levity has been invaluable to us.

Although John has ended his five decades as Surveyor, we are grateful that he will continue as a member of the Basin Development Commission. He remains an asset to any organization.



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?

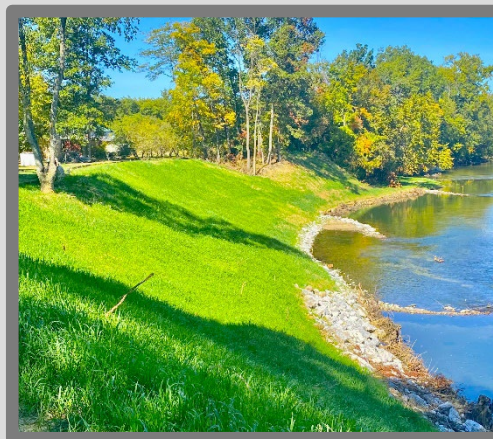
In 2019, the state of Indiana contributed \$2.3 million to begin work. After May 2021, capital projects will be funded by a limited annual assessment of properties within the Kankakee and Yellow River Basins. Under Indiana Code 14-13-9-21, these assessments are listed as \$7 per residential parcel; \$1 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.

MORE SUCCESS WITH HYDROSEEDING

As we have reported previously, the Commission is developing a system of seeding highly vulnerable riverbanks with native grasses. Our methods sidestep past barriers while maximizing the efficient and cost-effective application of seed.

Native, stabilizing grasses such as Virginia wildrye, riverbank wildrye, and switchgrass inhibit the release of sediment while adding strength and stability to the banks as they exist. The Commission further hopes that the selective reseeding of banks will save the Commission future repair costs.



Starke County, October 2022.

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.





STATE LINE BRIDGE

The Commission has directed the removal of the Kankakee River's State Line Bridge, an abandoned structure which has become a magnet for heavy debris at the Indiana-Illinois boundary.

In close partnership with Lake County officials, we have proposed to federal and state regulators to relocate the bridge to a historic preservation site. In this way, the bridge can be removed as a flood risk while saving the structure for bridge enthusiasts.

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.
- 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.

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