

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S LETTER ON INVASIVE SPECIES

The invasive plant species known as "Asian bush honeysuckle" challenges our work to stabilize riverbanks with deep-rooted, native grasses.

According to Indiana DNR documentation, "Asian bush honeysuckles grow so densely they shade out everything... often leaving nothing but bare soil."

Bush honeysuckle directly blocks seed and sunlight from large sections along the Kankakee and Yellow Rivers. For that reason, the Commission strives to reduce honeysuckle infestation and replace it with native grasses. On occasion, this means the temporary appearance of unseasonably brown foliage in preparation for reseeding.

As with other invasive species, Asian bush honeysuckle originated as an imported ornamental plant. It now directly threatens our bank strengthening and erosion control efforts.

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



Phase II section of Yellow River at 500 East in Starke County, July 2023.

PHASE TWO OF YELLOW RIVER WORK IN FULL SWING

In December 2022, the Kankakee River Basin and Yellow River Basin Development Commission completed Phase One of its mission to halt relentless Yellow River sediment erosion. Not only was the finished project a long-term asset for the region, but workers finished it on time and under budget.

With Phase Two of the Yellow River Bank Reconstruction now in full swing, the story is repeating itself.

Not even halfway through summer, a half mile section of riverbank just outside of Knox, Indiana, is in its final stages of construction.

"I think we're getting into a groove," said Commission Executive Director Scott Pelath. "In 2021, we started bank reconstruction at the most challenging spot we could find. With progress under our belts and a few lessons learned, you now can see the continual improvements in the quality and efficiency of sediment reduction efforts."

The current, Phase Two project encompasses two non-contiguous sections at County Road 500 East and County Road 1100 East in Starke County. As with the Phase One work, tasks entail 1) reducing bank grades, 2) increasing channel capacity; 3) reinforcing banks with stone and onsite wood; and 4) reseeding banks with native erosion-control vegetation.

"We select project areas where erosion is heaviest," said Commission Secretary and Starke County resident Bill Crase. "Sand from the Yellow River continually accumulates downstream, and the deposits make it harder to contain floodwater within the Kankakee and Yellow River channels."

Pelath added that property owner cooperation and support is another key factor in site selection.

"We would not be able to do our work without the partnership of property owners up and down the river," said Pelath. "They're the ones who provide access for heavy machinery, advise contractors on property details, and make useful suggestions for improvements."

The stabilization of unstable Yellow River banks is the primary component of the Commission's forty-year flood mitigation plan. Phase Three of the initiative is currently under design and slated to begin construction in 2024.

"We're making good progress," said Crase. "But we'll also be keeping our foot on the pedal."

Stantec in Walkerton designed the latest Starke County project, and The Stanger Group from Goshen is performing the construction.

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LOGJAM MANAGEMENT

One task is recommended in every year of the Commission's forty-year work plan: logjam management and removal. Logjams are a major inhibitor of water flow – particularly during flood conditions -- and present safety hazards for navigation.

Since January, Commission contractors have reduced logjams and the potential for jams at the following locations along the Kankakee and Yellow Rivers:

- 1) At the Indiana-Illinois State Line Bridge
- 2) At bridges throughout the Kankakee and Yellow Rivers, particularly in the lower watershed
- 3) Downstream of US 231 on the north bank
- 4) Between IN-39 and Knox on the Yellow River
- 5) Downstream of IN-17 on the Yellow River in Marshall County

For the remainder of 2023, the Commission plans continued logjam management in the vicinity of US 421 and downstream of US 41 on the Kankakee River, and continued effort downstream of IN-17 on the Yellow River.



State Line Bridge prior to logjam removal efforts in 2019.



State Line Bridge following regular removal of accumulated debris.

TEAM MEMBER PROFILE

Christine Keil, PS
LaPorte County
Surveyor's Office and
Drainage Board



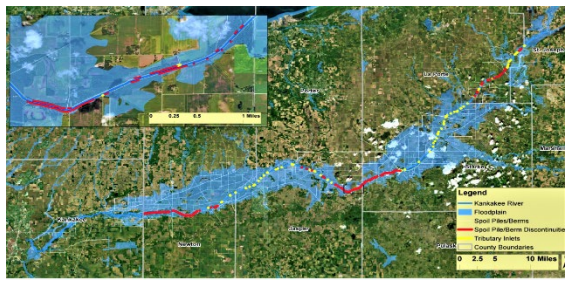
This August, Christine Keil will celebrate thirty-three years of employment at the LaPorte County Surveyor's Office. She is a third generation Indiana Licensed Professional Land Surveyor and is a graduate of Purdue University Northwest with a BS in Construction Engineering Management Technology. Christine is currently pursuing the MS in Geographic Information Science Administration at the University of West Florida.

Christine recently told the *River News*, "Over my many years with the Surveyor's Office and with the Drainage Board, I have enjoyed meeting and working with so many interesting and fantastic people. I have watched the Kankakee River Basin Commission evolve and grow into the very successful entity that it is today.

"The Kankakee and Yellow Rivers are in the best shape they have ever been in!" she continued. "It is a joy to witness, as is working with so many great folks who put their heart and soul into public service."

Executive Director Scott Pelath said it was characteristic of Christine to share credit, but that the Commission's progress would have been impossible without her.

"Out of a deep sense of duty, she helps us with a major task every week," said Pelath. "We simply cannot do without her expertise, professionalism, and sense of humor. She is one of the people who makes things work."



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 DEVELOPMENT

This past March, over two hundred acres owned by the Commission in Newton County began accepting floodwater via a spillway. Once marginal farm ground, the property now serves as a water storage area when the Kankakee River reaches flood stages.

In conjunction with the adjacent Blackberry Marsh property managed by the Indiana Department of Natural Resources, the watershed now has over four hundred acres of floodwater storage that did not exist until last year. Developing areas to manageably absorb excess water during flood conditions is one facet of our long-term work plan.



Kankakee River spillway in Newton County near Thayer, March 6, 2023.

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.





FLOOD RESPONSE PLANNING

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is leading development of a formal, coordinated flood response plan for the entirety of the Kankakee and Yellow Rivers. Even better, they obtained a source of funding to complete the effort.

Last month, Corps officials led a series of regional workshops to gather advice for the plan's construction. Over seventy local officials, property owners, and other stakeholders attended.

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.

RIVER NEWS Issue 07 August 2023



Kankakee River Basin and Yellow River
Basin Development Commission
460 Lincolnway, Unit 322
Valparaiso, Indiana 46384
<https://kankakeeandyellowrivers.org>