

**MORE ON
STATE LINE
BRIDGE**

The Commission deems the Kankakee River's State Line Bridge to be a direct obstacle to effective flood mitigation, a magnet for logjams and heavy debris during flood events, and a persistent barrier to navigation and safe movement.

Our organization actively works toward the bridge's relocation or removal. For those who value the historic characteristics of State Line Bridge, one must acknowledge that the bridge will not survive in any form in its current location. Not only is it decaying in place, but the structure will not indefinitely endure the frequent momentum of floodwater and debris.

The Commission values the workable preservation of State Line Bridge's historic characteristics. Even more, it values eliminating the bridge as persistent flood aggravator.

I remain available to answer questions about this or any other matter 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



Workers clear heavy debris from abandoned .bridge between Lake and Newton Counties.

COMMISSION TOUTS 2023 PROJECTS

At its final scheduled meeting of 2023, the Kankakee River Basin and Yellow River Basin Development Commission received a report highlighting the year's flood mitigation projects.

"As a retired county surveyor, I'm truly amazed at what we do," said St. Joseph County member and Commission Chair John McNamara at November's meeting. "I'm totally impressed with the amount of work we're getting done, and the quality of work we're getting done."

First on the list of completed projects was Phase II of the Yellow River Bank Reconstruction, which reshaped three miles of severely eroding river banks in Starke County. Workers completed the long-term sediment reduction initiative ahead of schedule while saving over \$300,000 within the project's budget.

"For the third straight year, the Commission stopped channel-clogging sediment at its source while finding savings along the way," said Commission Executive Director Scott Pelath. "Even better, these projects are physical assets that add value throughout the watershed for years to come."

Commission Secretary Bill Crase of Starke County strongly agreed.

"When we reshape severely eroding river banks, we reduce the buildup of sand that blocks the water during a flood," said Crase. "Mitigating floods requires work on many fronts, but attacking erosion is essential to any long-term improvements."

Throughout 2023, the Commission also:

- Added nearly 200 acres of contained floodwater storage upstream of IN-49 through construction of a spillway;
- Removed and prevented logjams along various Kankakee River sections from CR 1500 South in LaPorte County to the Illinois state line;
- Cleared Yellow River logjams in Marshall and Starke Counties;
- Removed heavy debris and obstructions at major Kankakee River bridges;
- Reseeded over eleven miles of Kankakee River banks with locally native grasses;
- Maintained a Kankakee River sediment trap downstream of the Robbins Ditch confluence;
- Completed designs and permits for Phase III of the Yellow River reconstruction and started permitting for Jasper County bank repair;
- Commenced a hydraulic study of flood mitigation impacts at the Kankakee Fish and Wildlife Area; and

"Despite these accomplishments, I expect the coming year will include further efforts to remove out-of-service bridges that catch heavy debris during floods," said Pelath. "We are four years into a forty-year work plan. Much work remains."

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KANKAKEE RIVER TEACHES LESSONS TO HOOSIER STUDENTS

by Linda Schwab

LaPorte County SWCD

The 2023 Kankakee River Days, an educational program geared for fourth grade students, was coordinated by the LaPorte County Soil & Water Conservation District this fall.

With the support of numerous partners and masters in natural resources and local history, this two-week event brought students to two separate locations on the Kankakee River for a day of immersive learning. Local experts provided hands-on lessons about wildlife resources, watersheds, water quality, microplastics, Native American history, and European explorers in the region. The day culminated with students canoeing on the Kankakee River in 24-foot wooden replica Voyageur canoes with paddling professionals.

By immersing the students in learning both on and beside the river, they gain an appreciation for the importance of the river as a resource, observe it up close, and develop a connection to the river and its place on the landscape. Students work as a team to navigate the river while acquiring new skills. Through this experience, the Kankakee River becomes more than a line on a map, a bridge on the road, a cut through the field. By exploring these concepts in one unique location, the different lessons are knitted



Historical reenactor presents to area fourth graders.

together to tell the story of place via tactile, task-focused, and team collaboration learning. Students develop a sense of “why should I care,” which will hopefully evolve into active stewardship.

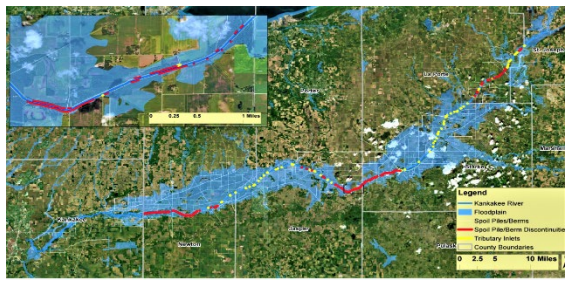
This complimentary program is offered to local schools within the Kankakee River basin in Northwest Indiana. Many hours of planning and teaching were provided by local agencies, including soil & water conservation districts, solid waste districts, county park districts, the Indiana Department of Natural Resources, and the Pokagon Band.

The generous monetary donations of local conservation and development groups alike, as well as corporate donations and grants, provided the funding to supply the canoes and professional staff. As we see school districts struggle to fund basic education needs, we are grateful for the outside financial support to continue this invaluable program and offer it to schools free of charge so that all students may take part.

On behalf of the students of Northwest Indiana, the LaPorte, Porter, Lake, and Newton County Soil & Water Conservation Districts would like to thank the Kankakee River Basin and Yellow River Basin Development Commission for their continuing support to this engaging educational experience.



Northwest Indiana school children board Kankakee River canoes, October 2023.



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.

CONTROLLED FLOODWATER STORAGE

In October, a new, contained floodwater storage area came online immediately upstream of IN-49 in Jasper County. An engineered spillway now connects the Kankakee River to the DNR's Aukiki Wetland Conservation area at moderate flood stage. An existing levee complex will manageably store surface water until river levels subside.

The project was the product of a close partnership between the Commission and DNR. Teamwork resulted in nearly two hundred acres of controlled floodwater containment that will further enhance the property's natural habitat.



Newly completed Kankakee River spillway at the Aukiki WCA in Jasper County near IN-49, October 2023.

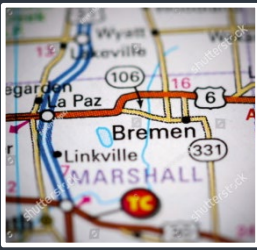
MISSION

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.





NEW RIVER GAUGE

To bolster the basin's U.S. Geological Survey gauges, the Commission has purchased and installed an added device supplied by OTT/HydroMet.

Yellow River gauge height data at First Road in Marshall County can now be viewed at <https://www.hydrometcloud.com/Kankakee>. We hope the data will teach us about the flow of water between Bremen and Plymouth while supplying additional flood forecasting information.

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 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 size.

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