

## A WORD ON OUR CONTRACTORS

They are cold in the winter, and hot in the summer.

They might get an emergency call from us late at night. They sometimes work long days an hour away from home. When they get back to their families, their boots and clothes might be covered in mud. When we pick up the phone in search of advice, they often are on the other end of the line.

Indiana contractors and workers who serve the Commission deserve our gratitude. Without our experienced regional workforce, flood mitigation work on the Kankakee and Yellow River would be a concept and not an action.

Our contractors remove heavy debris, haul material, repair banks, and fix water control structures. They reconstruct badly eroding river sections, reseed native vegetation, and enhance natural habitats. We are lucky to have them.

I remain available to answer questions about this or any other matter on our website or at [sdpelath@gmail.com](mailto:sdpelath@gmail.com). Questions and well-considered ideas are always welcome.

Sincerely,



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



Workers remove a logjam from an over century-old bridge over the Kankakee River (July 2024).

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## LOGJAM MANAGEMENT

Sometimes, the least glorious tasks are among the most important. Indiana workers who keep the river channels free of logjams and obstructions are among the unsung heroes in the Kankakee River Basin.

Since our December 2023 edition alone, the Commission has overseen logjam management and removal work at the following river locations:

- 1) The State Line Bridge
- 2) From the State Line Bridge to US 41
- 3) The railroad bridge immediately upstream of US 41
- 4) From the Dehaan Ditch confluence upstream to the railroad bridge
- 5) The Norfolk Southern bridge immediately downstream of I-65
- 6) The Range Line Road bridge in Lake County
- 7) From the Lake-Porter County Line to US 231
- 8) The US 231 bridge
- 9) The CR 250 West bridge in Porter County
- 10) From IN-49 to Baum's Bridge to Dunn's Bridge
- 10) Between the confluences of the Reeves and Cook Ditches
- 11) From the LaPorte-Porter County Line to US 421
- 12) Near Lomax Landing
- 13) From English Lake to IN-39 on both rivers
- 14) Between 100 West and Range Road on the Yellow River in Starke County
- 15) From Upas Road to Plymouth in Marshall County
- 16) Between IN-104 and the Little Kankakee
- 17) Bridge logjams in Plymouth

According to Commission member Bill Crase, the removal and prevention of logjams is about more than restoring the flow of water. "Obstructions often redirect water velocities into vulnerable banks, resulting in weakened protection and increased erosion," said Crase.

"Logjam management is demanding but necessary," Crase continued. "The Commission is fortunate to have an experienced team of contractors who are continually improving their effectiveness and efficiency."

## Bridge that attracts logjams on Kankakee River will be removed

BY DOUG ROSS

April 16, 2024 at 2:58 p.m.

Work will begin soon on removing a major source of logjams by U.S. 41 on the Kankakee River near Schneider.

About 30 narrowly spaced wooden supports from an abandoned Norfolk Southern Railroad bridge will be taken out, to below the mud line, thanks to an agreement worked out between U.S. Sen. Mike Braun's office, the railroad and the Kankakee River Basin and Yellow River Basin Development Commission.

Scott Pelath, the commission's executive director, said the bridge has been out of use long enough for trees 6 to 7 inches wide to grow through the bridge.

"There's a section with antiquated wooden supports that are very closely spaced, and it catches every log that floats down that side of the channel," Pelath said. "Because it takes up about one-third of the bridge span, you're in effect reducing the width of the channel at that point."

Removing those wooden supports will not only ease flooding concerns but also save the commission money. "They catch a ton of debris, and we usually end up having to clean it out three or four times a year," he said.

Concrete supports will remain. The railroad might someday want to reuse that abandoned rail line, Pelath said.

Where the bridge crosses the Kankakee River, Schneider is on the north side and Sumava Resorts on the south side. Both communities have seen flooding in the past.

"Those human-made barriers absolutely have an impact on flood conditions," Pelath said.

"Here's the thing about the Kankakee," Pelath said. "Inches of river height matter. Think about it. At Shelby, the difference between 11.5 feet and 12.5 feet is the difference between minor flood stage and major flood stage, just 1 foot."

"Whenever you can remove those barriers and cut even a few inches worth of the water height, that can be the difference between a manageable flood event and having a breach somewhere," he said.

"We've cleared out other bridges before that have had very substantial blockages and seen it, the logjam removal, show up in the U.S. Geological Survey gauges," Pelath said.

He credited Braun's office for moving quickly to reach the agreement with Norfolk Southern. Pelath was meeting with Braun's regional director, Tony Ferraro, about the State Line Bridge, another logjam troublemaker, and mentioned this railroad bridge.

Days later, he was meeting with railroad officials.

"Obstructions at this bridge have posed a risk to Northwest Indiana for too long," Braun said. "It's remarkable what common-sense things we can accomplish just by bringing the right people to the table. This agreement will save Northwest Indiana dollars not just in regular river maintenance, but in future flood costs along the Kankakee."

Under the agreement, work must be done before October, with the commission providing the funds and labor. That's no problem, work will begin as soon as river conditions permit, Pelath said.

"Folks know we've had plenty of rain the past few weeks, and we'll need things to dry out a little bit," he said.

The contractor will cut through the rail lines and remove the wooden infrastructure down to below the mud on the river bottom.

Norfolk Southern handled the necessary approvals.

"The proposal to remove the bridge section made good sense for everyone," said Derek Sublette, Norfolk Southern's assistant vice president of government relations. "We understand the impact antiquated structures have on current needs. We also know that any future rail service at that location would require an updated bridge. When the senator's office rang, we were glad to help."

Doug Ross is a freelance reporter for the Post-Tribune.

## NEW COMMISSION MEMBER WELCOMED



**Chelsey Gordon, P.E.**

*Program Manager*  
Porter County Storm Water Management

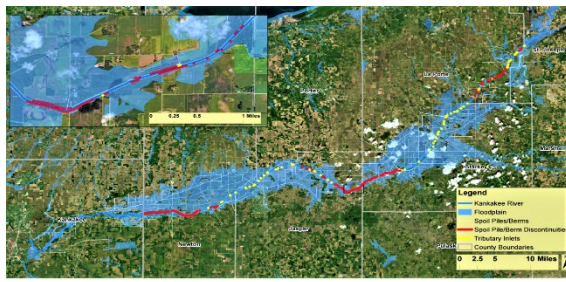
We are fortunate that this April, the Porter County Commissioners appointed Chelsey Gordon, P.E., to serve our organization. Chelsey takes the place of longtime member Mike Novotney, who recently joined the private sector after years of outstanding leadership.

A native of Warsaw, Indiana, and a graduate of Valparaiso University, Chelsey currently oversees Porter County's complex stormwater management system. Before her promotion to Program Manager two years ago, she served for five years as the department's Stormwater Engineer.

Chelsey also brings to the Basin Development Commission demonstrable private sector experience at the Weaver Consultants Group and on the research staff of her Valparaiso alma mater. She possesses a valuable record of practical experience with the Kankakee River, a history that includes essential tasks like bank repair, logjam management, and property owner communications.

The Basin Development Commission is highly fortunate to add Chelsey's expertise, leadership, and teamwork values to our 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](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.*





## ASIAN BUSH HONEYSUCKLE

The Commission works to reduce a noxious invasive plant species known as Asian bush honeysuckle. The plant renders riverbanks highly vulnerable to erosion.

According to Indiana DNR, "Asian bush honeysuckles originate in Eurasia. They were introduced as ornamentals, for wildlife cover, and for soil erosion control. However, their aggressive domination of native communities makes them a bad choice for these purposes."

## 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 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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