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KANKAKEE COMMISSION CELEBRATES PROJECT COMPLETIONS, LOOKS AHEAD

KNOX — When the Indiana formed the Kankakee River Basin and Yellow River Basin Development Commission (“the Commission”) in 2019, Commission Treasurer Bill Crase of Starke County knew that reversing a century of mounting flood risks would take time and energy.

But nearly seven years later, he said it is hard not to see the improvements.

“When I started on this Commission, the Kankakee and Yellow Rivers were not serving anyone very well, and it did not matter if you were a farmer, a nearby resident, or a canoer,” said Crase. “Every year, more sand would fill the channel, more banks would erode, and more fallen trees would jam up the rivers. Things are changing for the better.”

This past year, the Commission wrapped up Phase III of its Yellow River reconstructions and the restoration of nearly five miles of severely eroding river channel. In Jasper County, the panel oversaw another two-mile long stabilization of decaying banks on the Kankakee River. As always, the Commission worked to prevent logjams and remove them when identified. Indiana contractors kept bridges free from heavy debris and channel obstructions.

“We are in this for the long haul,” continued Crase. “Indiana modified the Kankakee River over a hundred ago, and you could easily find another hundred years of work to do. But if you look at the rivers as much as some of us, you can’t help but notice the improvements.”

Newton County Commissioner Rob Churchill, who represents his county on the Kankakee panel, agreed with Crase’s assessment while expressing even more excitement

about projects slated for 2026. First among them is the removal of State Line Bridge, an objective of area officials for decades.

“Removing that bridge from its location will be huge for us in the lower watershed. As a longtime magnet for logs and obstructions, it’s a culprit in making high-water events even higher,” said Churchill. “And a lot of folks upstream have come to see that it obstructs natural water flow for everyone. Elimination of the hazard will be a lasting asset to all of us.”

Other projects planned for 2026 include the reconfiguration of water control structures at the Kankakee Fish and Wildlife Area, a test project to repurpose a flow-blocking island in the Yellow River, smaller bank repairs, and ongoing logjam and sediment management activities.

Commission Executive Director Scott Pelath reported that the Indiana DNR and Department of Environmental Management have already issued permits for the State Line Bridge project. A permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is in progress.

Further information about the Commission’s mission and projects can be found at kankakeeandyellowrivers.org.

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